



Articles

Deaf adult learners and their teacher: Knowledge construction and meaning-making through the lens of translanguaging and semiotic repertoires

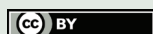
Alunos adultos surdos e o professor: Construção de conhecimento e significado através das lentes da translanguagem e repertórios semióticos

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on a preliminary investigation into the language practices of three groups of deaf learners of English, all users of British Sign Language (BSL), and myself as their tutor in an adult education setting. These practices were explored through the lens of translanguaging, viewed as both a description of a linguistic process, and a theory of language, to learn more about how we draw on the totality of our resources to communicate and make meaning. The purpose of this investigation was to learn more about how BSL and English are used together in the same context and how that interplay works to our advantage. Additionally, consideration was also given to the contribution manually-coded English systems such as Sign Supported English (SSE) and Signed English (SE) make, together with the other written and sign languages, as well as

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gesture, enactment, pointing and other semiotic resources. Video recorded interactional data were collected from the classroom and supported by reflective notes and lesson plans. Both the video data, uploaded for analysis to ELAN, a multi-media annotation tool for creating time-aligned transcripts that supports a tier-based data model, and the written data corpus were examined using a thematic analysis. The findings revealed an illuminating picture of the interplay between languages, but also a movement beyond language as part of a broader semiotic repertoire to construct meaning in the classroom.

Keywords: *translanguaging and deaf education; translanguaging and sign languages; teaching English to sign language users; teaching deaf adults.*

RESUMO

Este artigo é baseado em uma investigação preliminar sobre práticas de línguas de três grupos de estudantes surdos da língua inglesa, todos usuários da Língua de Sinais Britânica (BSL) e eu como professor em um cenário de educação para adultos. Estas práticas foram exploradas através de lentes da translanguagem, vista como uma descrição do processo linguístico assim como teoria da linguagem, para aprendermos melhor a utilizar todos os nossos recursos para comunicação e criação de significado. O propósito desta investigação foi aprender um pouco mais sobre como a BSL e a Língua Inglesa são usadas conjuntamente no mesmo contexto e como esta interação nos traz vantagens. Adicionalmente, consideramos a contribuição de sistemas do Inglês manualmente codificados como Sign Supported English (SSE) e Signed English (SE), juntamente com outras línguas escritas e de sinais, assim como gestos, encenação, indicação e outros recursos semióticos. Dados interativos e gravados em vídeo foram coletados em salas de aula e respaldados por anotações reflexivas e planos de aulas. Tanto as informações em vídeo, transferidas para a ferramenta de anotações multimídia ELAN, que cria transcrições alinhadas no tempo baseado em um modelo de dados em níveis, como todo o conjunto de dados escritos, foram examinados usando uma análise temática. As descobertas revelaram um quadro esclarecedor da interação entre as línguas, mas também um movimento além da linguagem como parte de um repertório semiótico mais amplo para construir significado em sala de aula.

Palavras-chave: *translanguagem e educação de surdos; translanguagem e língua de sinais; ensinando inglês para usuários de língua de sinais; ensinando adultos surdos.*

1. Note on writing convention and the D/d distinction

Kusters and Meulder (2017, p. 13) address the issue of the long-standing writing convention² and D/d distinction when referring to deaf people who are sign language users and state that it creates a “dichotomy and an oversimplification of what is an increasingly complex set of identities and language practices”, and that “multiple positionalities and multimodal language use is impossible to represent with a simplified binary”. This has resonance, particularly when considering the demographic of my learners. Therefore, this article will not use uppercase D and uses the generic term “deaf” and refers to “sign language users”.

2. Contextualising the study

I am affiliated to a well-established adult education provider in London teaching in a small department that is the Centre for Deaf Education and one of very few provisions that cater specifically for deaf adults who are sign language users in the UK. We specialise in teaching English, mathematics and computing. Additionally, we teach British Sign Language (BSL) to deaf individuals who originate from overseas to help them integrate into the British signing community, as well as to hearing people that wish to learn.

Many of my students originate from overseas and have their native sign language as a first language. After some time in the UK, they are all subsequently competent in BSL. Additionally, I have British-born deaf people with BSL as a first language and some lifelong exposure to English. They learn together for practical and financial reasons (the courses are government funded and free of charge to deaf learners), and are taught in deaf-only groups by a small number of tutors, deaf and hearing, and all are competent sign language users.

2. This convention has been to use upper case *D* when referring to those who are linguistically and culturally deaf (have a sign language as a first or preferred language and identify as being part of a deaf community) to distinguish them from those who have hearing loss but do not use a sign language or identify with those that do.

Therefore, all students are learning English in the written modality, as a second or additional language irrespective of where they originate. I am cautious about using labels such as literacy (quite a few of my learners are competent in the written languages of their countries of origin), functional skills, or ESOL to accurately define the learning context in which I teach because it contains elements of all of these and yet none quite capture the context entirely. I prefer to think of the courses, and the context in general, as *English for deaf learners*, which feels more encompassing. The shared, over-arching experience of the students is that they are deaf and have a sign language as a first or preferred language, with BSL being the primary language of instruction and communication in the classroom.

3. Translanguaging: origins, definitions and tensions

This article reports on a preliminary investigation that set out to explore the language practices and communication strategies employed by my deaf learners and myself for meaning-making through the lens of translanguaging, a term coined by head teacher Cen Williams (1994) in the 1980s in Wales, a country in the United Kingdom. Williams explored teaching methods that were proving to be successful with learners, and had turned monolingual English-speaking children into bilingual English/Welsh speakers. Williams set about developing a teaching and learning dynamic that maximised learners' language abilities by using the mother tongue (English) to secure full understanding and learn more about how communication practices among teachers and their learners can enhance learning. Williams and his colleague Colin Baker settled on a translation of the Welsh term *trawsieithu* as *translanguaging*. Williams explained that translanguaging simply meant receiving information in one language and using it or applying it in another (1994, 1996) while Baker (2011, p. 288) refers to it as “the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages” and additionally, “the planned and systematic use of two languages inside the same lesson”.

Since then, the work of scholars such as Garcia (2009) and Li Wei (2011; 2016; 2017) on the topic of translanguaging has contributed to our knowledge of language, education and bilingualism and there

has been a burgeoning exploration into translanguaging pedagogy. Translanguaging has now evolved into theory of language as proposed by Li Wei (2017, p. 15) who argues that it “empowers both teacher and learner, transforms power relations and moreover, focuses the process on meaning-making”.

Li Wei (2017, p. 9) suggests that the burgeoning body of work has created a situation where some have viewed non-conventional language practices as translanguaging and that it has been seen as a somewhat umbrella term that incorporates code-switching, code-mixing, code-meshing and crossing. He adds that the term translanguaging is also in competition it seems with many other terms and that some scholars argue that it is not necessary and just another neologism. However, by framing translanguaging as a practical theory of language that applied linguistics needs, Li Wei successfully clarifies some confusion and clearly points out its added value. Discussions about translanguaging appear to have moved on from previous ideas about language and focus on more dynamic and fluid uses. Garcia and Li Wei (2014, p.2) describe translanguaging as

an approach to the use of language, bilingualism and the education of bilinguals that considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has traditionally been the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages. (Garcia and Li Wei, 2014, p. 2)

Similarly, Otheguy, Garcia and Reid (2015, p. 281) define translanguaging as “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages”.

This shift and expansion of translanguaging from its origins as a way to describe a linguistic process into a theory of language (also applied to other contexts besides education) has created some perceived tensions. Turner and Lin (2017, p. 1) suggest that it is currently a “subaltern” theory that could perhaps be turned into a majority theory if it were to acknowledge the social construct of named languages as a way to expand one’s linguistic repertoire. They state that one of the objectives behind translanguaging as a theory is to disrupt language

hierarchies and address inequalities faced by minority language speakers. They posit that in this regard, translanguaging is a political act but that its pedagogic benefit by “harnessing and validating students’ complete linguistic repertoires to help them learn has often led to translanguaging losing its political sense”. Meanwhile, MacSwan (2017) argues that the political use of language names *should* be used and that individuals might have a single linguistic repertoire but within that distinct mental grammars. Given that for so long sign languages have not been valued and nurtured it feels important to acknowledge BSL as a named language in my classroom, and I might add, English as the target language.

Maybe, part of unpacking and understanding translanguaging is to appreciate its complexity and be cognisant of different definitions and perceived tensions. Yet for this study, it felt important to try and understand its underlying simplicity. Cen Williams (personal communication May 2017) believes that the original definitions of receiving information in one language and using it or applying it in another, and the “planned and systematic use of two languages inside the same lesson” (Baker, 2011, p. 288) are the ones that have the most value. This has resonance for my own context as a teacher of English to adult deaf sign language users and where my desire to orchestrate a space for translanguaging is motivated by an opportunity to employ all of our linguistic and additional semiotic resources (going beyond, being creative) for meaning-making.

4. Translanguaging and Deaf Education

Swanwick (2017) acknowledges that translanguaging has begun to be mentioned in the literature in the context of deaf education, with reference to signed, spoken and written languages being used in the classroom by teachers and learners. She adds that while this is seen as a positive development in terms of repertoires and bilingual education, there are some concerns. Primarily, that translanguaging will promote the development of the spoken language of the majority community in the classroom rather than validate the use of sign language and that this practice “encourages the manipulation of sign language by educators of the deaf and the uncritical mix of sign and spoken language” (2017,

p. 234). As Swanwick explains, in the context of deaf education this is problematic given that in past decades, sign language has not been valued or nurtured.

Swanwick (2017, p. 235-237) does acknowledge, on a positive note, that balanced with the controversies, translanguaging as it pertains to deaf education has gained “momentum and currency” in the wider field of multilingualism as an “additive view of bilingualism” where acquisition of second or additional languages is not deemed to have a negative impact on language users (or their other languages). This perspective acknowledges how individuals use their linguistic resources to make meaning. Swanwick believes the success of translanguaging is a result of this focus on repertoires. She explains that previously language policies have had a propensity to lead practice whereas learner repertoire brings a fresh perspective.

She states (2017, p. 235-237) that a language repertoire incorporates this set of integrated linguistic skills across languages constituting one behavioural whole. She offers that this concept has kept up with increasing linguistic diversity and the diverse and varied language practices amongst communities where interactions across and between different groups and cultures “gives rise to increasingly dynamic and mobile language practices”. She explains that by repertoire we mean “the multidimensional constellation of linguistic resources, values and practices” and that this provides us with a framework to explore linguistic practices differently. This reminds me of the phrase about the “whole” being more than the sum of its individual parts.

There has been a relative dearth of studies in the literature that give specific focus to teaching deaf adults, in particular using a sign language to scaffold the learning of the target language. One was undertaken by Miller and Rosenthal (1995) in their study of the use of American Sign Language in the summarisation of English texts while another was Precsko’s (2011) use of Hungarian Sign Language in the teaching of English to Deaf students.

In 2016, linguists, educators and researchers came together in Göttingen, Germany to contribute to a symposium titled: “Translanguaging and repertoires across signed and spoken languages: Insights from linguistic ethnographies in (super) diverse contexts”. The

purpose was to examine key concepts in the study of spoken and signed languages in superdiverse contexts, and multimodal repertoires. The sociolinguistic study of signed and spoken languages has developed separately and the two days aimed to bring together these separate areas of study. The conference discussed a number of studies and papers, that indicated translanguaging, across languages but also *modalities* of language (signed and spoken) is a burgeoning area of interest.

One presentation was followed by a published paper from Sweden that gave focus to deaf lecturers' translanguaging in a higher education setting and was a multimodal multilingual perspective (Holmström and Schönström, 2017) and offers an interesting view of translanguaging and deaf adult education. Holmström and Schönström set out to examine the use of different languages and modalities of language by three deaf lecturers when teaching adult students in a Swedish university. The learners were a mixture of deaf and hearing, but all the hearing students were sign language users. The study was conducted using an ethnographic approach and the three lecturers (one male, two female) were recorded to obtain interactional data when instructing students in four subjects. These were: Swedish Sign Language, Swedish (written) as a second language for deaf learners, Sign Language and Teaching, and Cognitive Grammar.

Using multimodal analysis, they examined the classroom interaction using a range of modes and the interplay between these modes. Using ELAN, a multi-media annotation software that was designed for the creation of time-aligned text annotations to audio and video files, they analysed four specific features: language, mode, interaction and pointing. They decided to separate language and mode from each other in the analysis so it was conducive for determining which specific languages were evident and the modality with which they were expressed. In their analysis, the first theme that they focused on was the languages in play.

Their findings revealed one striking observation which was that Swedish Sign Language and written Swedish and English were used simultaneously. Swedish Sign Language was used as the primary mode of instruction, and this was the language that the lecturers and students communicated in predominantly, while written Swedish and English

were also used on the interactive whiteboard. They also determined different modes that existed that were evident simultaneously, those being the signed modality (Swedish Sign Language) and the written modality.

5. Multimodality

Multimodality has developed as both a theory of communication and a pedagogical approach. Archer (2006, p. 3) states that

As a theory of communication it accounts for the multiplicity of modes of meaning-making, and contributes to the theorising of links between shifting semiotic landscapes, globalisation, re-localisation, and identity formation. As a particular approach to pedagogy, a multimodal pedagogy seeks to go beyond written and spoken language to value a range of modes through multimodal assessment practices. (Archer, 2006, p. 3)

In a teaching and learning setting, there are various modes; images, speech, gestures and PowerPoint presentations that are often used together to create meaning. Of course, in this present study, speech is not a mode of communication and instead sign language, gesture and enactment all feature more prominently.

All human interactions and linguistic repertoires are multimodal (Norris, 2004; Kusters, 2017). Kusters et al. (2017) explain that individuals speak, sign, point, gesture, write, draw, handle objects and move their bodies and these different modes feature more prominently in some contexts and less so in others. They add that researchers focusing on multimodality as it pertains to spoken languages and on gesture studies have a propensity to focus on monolingual utterances while research into translanguaging has focused on bilingual/multilingual communication but has not incorporated multimodality.

They suggest that research that combines the two is needed in order for a fresh perspective on the multimodal and multilingual aspects of communication and a better understanding of translanguaging, one that focuses on how individuals draw on their resources (in all modes) for the purposes of meaning-making. The aforementioned study undertaken by Holmström and Schönström's (2017, p. 5) did this successfully

asserting that “translanguaging involving a written language and a sign language is not possible without the interplay of several modes at once”. This preliminary investigation into the language practices of myself and my learners echoes this and sought to explore the way in which British Sign Language and English were used together for meaning-making together with other modes of communication such as gesture, enactment, pointing, images, drawings and objects.

6. British Sign Language, manually-coded English systems and International Sign

It is worth taking time to give clarity to some of the terminology that will be used in this article regarding signed communication observed in the classroom and the differences between BSL, and manually-coded English systems. Unpacking manually-coded English systems is complex.

There are many terms used in English speaking countries for these such as Total Communication, Signed English, Signed Exact English, Sign Supported Speech, Contact Sign or Simultaneous Communication. In the UK the terms Sign Supported English (SSE) and Signed English (SE) are used. For some people, these two terms (SSE and SE) are used interchangeably and grouped under the umbrella of being manual representations of English. Others, prefer to make a distinction between SSE and SE as do I.

BSL is the sign language used in Britain and Northern Ireland by the signing deaf community and is a distinct language with its vocabulary and grammar. At the time of writing this article, although BSL has been recognised in the UK as such, it has yet to achieve legal recognition. and a campaign to this end has been underway and a debate is due to be heard in parliament on March 18th 2022³.

Marshall and Hobsbaum (2015, p. 617) explain that SSE uses “the conventionalised signs of BSL which are presented alongside spoken

3. On the 28th April 2022 the BSL Bill was given Royal Assent and became the BSL Act 2022. The act creates greater recognition and understanding of BSL, and inclusion and equality for BSL users by legally recognising BSL as a language in England, Wales, and Scotland.

English, and they follow English word order rather than the word order of BSL (that has a grammar independent of that of English)". Sutton-Spence and Woll (1998, p. 15-16) also explain SSE in this way stating that it "is used adhering to the rules of English word order together with English lexical mouthing" and that the "key-words of a sentence are signed while the person speaks". These definitions are helpful and capture the essence of SSE, but these authors do not mean that SSE is simply BSL with the word order changed to match the English. Given that the linguistic features and grammar of BSL are different from that of English, if the signs are supporting the English rather than adhering to the linguistic boundaries of BSL they often lack the rich visual quality of BSL and non-manual features (e.g., facial expression for negation and adverbials), gesture, body movement and enactment can often be reduced or lost entirely. Additionally, signs can sometimes be used out of context and do not reflect the intended meaning.

Sutton-Spence and Woll (1998 p. 15-16) offer that SSE does not refer to a single way of communicating. They suggest that individuals fluent in BSL and English will use SSE differently from someone fluent in BSL but who only knows a little English and differently again from someone who is fluent in English but only knows a little BSL. One deaf colleague states that his communication preferences are essentially "SSE with BSL features, depending on who I am talking to" and I think that this statement nicely captures the complexity of SSE and its relationship with BSL.

Sutton-Spence and Woll (1998, p. 15-16) provide a separate definition of Signed English (SE) stating that it uses basic BSL signs in English word order as SSE does but that it also incorporates a lot of fingerspelling to show English grammar (for instance, inflectional morphology, articles, or linking and helping verbs) as a way to provide a full manual representation of English. They state that it is almost always used with speech and they are correct to say *almost* because in my classes such constructions are usually produced without voice. Schembri (2010, p. 107) writing in the Australian context describes Australasian Signed English as a signed code for spoken English created by educators. He states that it is "a contrived and artificial signed system created by educators to represent English grammar morpheme by morpheme" and it is not the language of the wider Australian deaf

community which is Auslan (Australian Sign Language). In the same way, SE is not the language of the British deaf community. I make the distinction between SSE and SE because in my classroom the latter is sometimes used as a way to represent English manually when focusing on grammar (form and structure) using fingerspelling. Twenty-six different hand configurations in the BSL hand-alphabet (a two handed manual alphabet) and each correspond to the letters in the English alphabet enabling representation of English words by spelling it out on the hands. SSE does not involve itself with inflectional morphology and is used more when the focus is on the content of a spoken or written text (rather than grammatical form and structure) when users want to reflect the overall syntax of English but use signs to support that.

As mentioned, some of the learners on my courses originate from overseas and have different native sign languages as a first language. They are reasonably competent in BSL having been living in the UK for some time, but this competence in BSL varies amongst individual learners.

Communication in the classroom lends itself to a very visually informed style of signing at times and is less reliant on the English with those that originate from overseas. Occasionally, signs from other sign languages can creep into learners' overall production in BSL with more gesture and enactment observed and a general propensity to exploit the iconic feature of sign languages. However, I feel cautious about stating that it constitutes International Sign, and is instead our own classroom variety, a variety that is somewhat difficult to define.

7. Framing the study

The study was contextualised as linguistic ethnography (LE). A relatively new, somewhat umbrella term, originating in the United Kingdom, it encapsulates a burgeoning body of research that blends linguistic and ethnographic approaches to examine communicative processes in various contexts (Creese, 2008). Hou and Kusters (2018) offer some valuable insight into LE in the context of sign languages and demonstrate how this approach has illuminated our understanding of how sign languages emerge and develop, how individuals acquire

sign languages and how they negotiate communication with each other. Ethnographic research methods have been used to explore the experiences of sign language users including studies of whole bilingual communities (bilingual in a sign language and a spoken language) such as Groce's study (1985) of the linguistic impact that the high incidence of hereditary deafness had on the Martha's Vineyard (Cape Cod, Massachusetts) and Branson et al's investigation (1996) of the same phenomena in a remote village in Bali, Indonesia. Other studies have undertaken lexical elicitation type investigations to compare different sign languages to ascertain relatedness (Aldersson & McEntee-Atalianis, 2008) or to explore variation within and across sign languages pertaining to certain semantic fields (Sagara & Zeshan, 2016).

8. Methodology

Three groups of deaf adult learners were identified that could potentially participate in the study and all participants agreed.⁴ These groups were considered purely for practical reasons, they were the same groups that I was teaching, and I had regular contact with them as part of our weekly lessons meaning it was conducive for collecting data. The age range of the students across the three groups was 20-50.

Copland and Creese (2015, p. 51) state that it is common amongst researchers undertaking linguistic ethnographic studies to perceive the status of the interactional data as "core" with field notes, interviews, texts and artefacts often playing a more "supplementary" role. They suggest that it is often the case that these sources "help contextualise the interactional data and are not accorded the same level of analytical attention" and urge caution against this thinking, stressing that linguistic ethnography's strength lies in the combining of different data collection sets rather than viewing them as separate with some being more useful than others. They offer that it is a combination of approaches that result in "robust and nuanced findings" that emerge with each data set working with and for the other data and thus more powerful as a

4. Consent was sought bilingually (English and BSL). I was also transparent about my dual role as researcher and teacher and promised that I would be mindful of this when balancing the desire to gather data with fulfilling my contractual obligations (ensuring my students meet the learning outcomes).

whole than as the sum of individual parts. Being cognisant of this was useful for the analysis.

Data were gathered from video-recorded observations, my reflective notes and lesson plans (useful for considering the strategic and planned nature of our use of linguistic and semiotic resources). Each data set supported and fed into the other allowing for some measure of triangulation. Ten activities were video recorded over the course over six weeks. Three of those activities (students' grammar presentations) were the same, and subsequently the three recordings were edited into one video hence there were eight recordings of interactional data. Both English (written modality and manually-encoded modality) and BSL (visual modality) were used. The video recordings of these classroom activities were made using the video recording function on an I-phone. Some activities required two devices in order to capture both the learners and myself from the respective angles. The learners assisted with setting up the camera and securing the frame.

The data were analysed using a thematic analysis and annotations were made on the lesson plans/reflective notes. To annotate and analyse the video recorded sign language data, I used ELAN, a multi-media annotation software that was designed for the creation of time-aligned text annotations to audio and video files (Crasborn, 2006). Users of ELAN can add an unlimited number of annotations which could be a sentence, a single lexical item, a contextual gloss, comment, translation or description of any feature observed in the media.

9. Findings

Analysis of the collected data revealed a dynamic communicative environment that was multilingual and involved the written and signed modalities of language incorporating English (including manually-coded English systems) and BSL but also occasional instances of some of the written and sign languages of the learners' countries of origin and our classroom variety of international sign. Gesture, enactment and pointing were also evident. Multimedia and other semiotic resources were also in play such as the monitor, flashcards, drawings, handouts, calculators, mobile phones (for access to images and translations) and

other objects in the classroom for points of reference. The bilingual nature of the classroom across both modalities was strategically orchestrated and facilitated by myself as the teacher. Learners were encouraged to use whatever linguistic or additional semiotic resource they needed to construct knowledge and make meaning alongside my use of these. The following key themes arising from the study were identified:

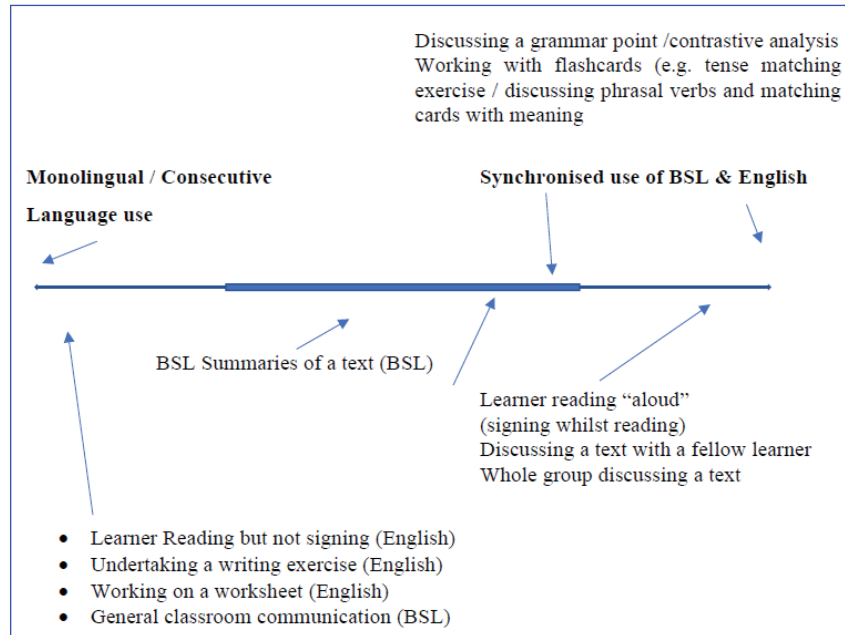
- Simultaneity, chaining and translation as mutually overlapping phenomena.
- Linguistic repertoires as part of broader semiotic repertoires.
- Evidence of a translanguaging stance, space and instinct.

10. Simultaneity, chaining and translation as mutually overlapping phenomena

Given that the target language is English, and the language of instruction and communication in the classroom is primarily BSL, I already knew that both languages were used. And yet the findings revealed a much more fluid and dynamic movement across and between the two languages than was previously realised.

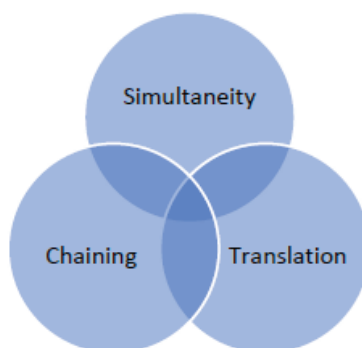
It feels helpful to describe the interplay between the two languages as sitting on a continuum. At one end we had more monolingual classroom activities (which were not recorded and analysed). Further along towards the other end of this continuum there is increased movement and fluidity between BSL and English and use of one language was less sustained. There were many instances of English being accessed in its written modality while referring to it and talking about it in BSL (tenses matching exercises, discussion of the meaning of phrasal verbs with the worksheets /laminated cards). Figure 1 below tries to capture this in a visual way.

Figure 1 – Monolingual-Bilingual Continuum



Further along that continuum, a very synchronous use of BSL and English together (synchronous chaining) was observed when learners were reading an English text and signing at the same time or reading and discussing the text. Here, the interplay between the two languages points towards a true simultaneous use English and BSL and ergo their two respective modalities. This simultaneity of languages/modalities in use echoes the findings and experiences of Holmström and Schönström’s (2017) study.

Figure 2 illustrates this simultaneity occurring in conjunction with chaining and translation. Bagga-Gupta (2004, p. 184-194) defines chaining as the process of linking two languages. She separates chaining as three distinct phenomena; local chaining, event chaining and synchronised chaining. Local chaining occurs when I point to an English word and ask the learners what they understand it to mean and then they might respond with a sign or possible interpretation or the learners fingerspell a word they have read and ask for the meaning in BSL. The word is localised within the text, and a translation/link to the other language is made.

Figure 2 – Simultaneity, Chaining and Translation

Event chaining might occur when learners might read a paragraph and then discuss it. Finally, synchronised chaining occurs when sustained use of both languages are used synchronously, for example, when a learner is “reading aloud” (signing while reading) or I am translating English into BSL.

Figure 3 – Synchronous chaining**Figure 4** – Event chaining

Phrasal verbs, colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions usually impact on successful chaining. While helpful to distinguish between these three elements of chaining, (and I suspect there is some overlap) they still all point to simultaneity of language use and a blending and meshing of languages and modalities. Chaining could be described as a way of creating a bridge between the two languages and a method for constructing that bridge is through translation. Chaining and translation underpinned much of what went on and was one of the most frequent and practical strategies for meaning-making.

A lesson on phrasal verbs is a good example of simultaneity, chaining and translation as mutually overlapping phenomena. The learners used laminated cards of English phrasal verbs. They were invited to state what they think they mean. Learners had to put aside their pre-existing knowledge of the verbs and their attached particles and re-construct the meaning as a single semantic unit. The cards are laid out on the table together and the learners are discussing potential meanings in BSL evidencing simultaneity.

Figure 5 – Discussing phrasal verbs



There was some literal transference from the separate words which did not express the idea clearly but also some successful translations of the real meaning. Some learners had more exposure to certain phrasal verbs such as “give up” or “stand up” and this was easily conveyed in BSL. Others such as “iron out” and “die down” proved more problematic. The learners attempted to translate these into BSL and the process constitutes chaining and translation as well as simultaneous use of BSL and English in two different modalities.

In another recorded activity two learners discuss a text. There is evidence of local, event, and synchronous chaining when one learner points to a word (localised) and clarifies the meaning, or when they read a paragraph and then pause to discuss it, and also when they read and translate into BSL at the same time. There is a transference of meaning from the English to BSL and to manage this the two languages are being used together.

One activity requires the learners to match some English sentences (using the verb “work”) with the correct tense. Twelve laminated strips (I work, she is working, I have worked, I had worked) are laid out, and learners are instructed to choose from the corresponding tense labels (simple past, future perfect). The learners discuss this in BSL as they refer to the laminated strips. Additionally, metalanguage was observed in both English and BSL. Though a process of elimination and discussion they successfully match up the laminated sentences with the correct label.

Figure 6 – Tense matching exercise



Chaining and translation are integral features of meaning-making allowing us to clarify and truly understand the target language. In the activity teaching the Past Perfect, there is some discussion surrounding the metalanguage and other vocabulary. Referring to the infographics and English text on the monitor I introduce the topic of the “Present Perfect”. I need them to know the metalanguage in English as they will be seeing it and using it with their handouts and workbooks. I did not sign “perfect” using the established sign in BSL as per its other meaning (excellent/flawless). I needed to use a different sign, but there is no established⁵ sign in BSL for “perfect” in the context of English grammar.

5. I have recently completed a preliminary study of signs in BSL for metalinguistic terms as part of a collaborative enquiry with other teachers of English to sign language users, to explore this and determine what signs are currently in use.

Therefore, I created one for this purpose and used the sign in BSL meaning “completed”. while retaining the English mouthing “perfect” with the sign. Could this constitute the “moving beyond” of language boundaries? I am stepping outside of the boundaries of BSL and doing something quite unusual, and it does not go unnoticed. One learner, who is a good lipreader, spots it. He sees the sign but notes I mouth “perfect” and asks why. I was hoping for this as it allowed for some discussion on the meaning of “perfect” and how I had to be creative and wanted to retain the mouthing but did not want to use a sign that would not be contextual.

I have chosen to present these three (simultaneity, translation and chaining) as a single theme and as mutually overlapping phenomena because usually when the two languages are being used together it was often in the context of transference of meaning from one language to the other. They featured prominently as part of meaning-making in most interactions.

11. Manually-coded English systems, International Sign and other languages

Manually-coded English systems such as Sign Supported English (SSE) and Signed (exact) English (SE) were also evident. SE in particular, was conducive for giving a manual representation of the English when teaching structure and form and incorporated fingerspelling. SSE was evident sometimes when learners were reading or when signing a sentence and the word order of English was more important. When discussions about the text had a focus more on meaning, BSL was used more.

Additionally, the written languages of the learners’ countries of origin were occasionally evident. Encouraging learners to utilise all of their linguistic resources as part of meaning-making in the classroom felt crucial and formed part of the translanguaging stance that seeks to maximise learners’ potential.

One of my groups comprised of learners who all originated from overseas. Given that they did not have a shared native sign language and the language they do share is an acquired sign language there were instances where we relied on a much more visually informed style of signing that at time borders on what some might say constitutes our own classroom variety of international sign. Sometimes learners shared a different native sign language. When they were interacting together, they used this but switched back to BSL when necessary. I feel this is worth mentioning given that this is an interesting additional variable, and translanguaging across and between different sign languages is indeed a consideration for future investigations.

12. Linguistic repertoires as part of broader Semiotic Repertoires

As well as the dynamic interplay between BSL and English, other elements contributed to knowledge construction and meaning making in the classroom. Gesture, pointing and enactment were all evident in the classroom although where the demarcation point is when these phenomena are part of sign language and separate from sign language is difficult to ascertain.

Multimedia was used regularly and consistently as part of class activities. Learners used their mobile phones to access google translate to translate new English words into the written languages of their countries of origin, or words from that language into English. Google images were often used by myself and the learners to get a good visual idea of something. For instance, “estuary”, “meteorite”, or “car boot sale” were efficiently and effectively conveyed this way rather than an explanation using BSL or English. The interactive monitor with access to the internet was crucial for all lessons. Diagrams and drawings to strategically (and spontaneously) contribute to meaning making, such as a timeline when teaching the tenses, featured considerably. Other semiotic resources such as laminated cards, images, drawings and classroom objects together with the English and BSL evidenced a linguistic repertoire as being part of a broader semiotic repertoire. All of the aforementioned resources indicated a rich and fluid communicative dynamic. It prompted me to remember that the prefix “trans” indicates

a movement not only across and between language and language boundaries, but beyond language itself.

13. Evidence of a translanguaging stance, space and instinct

Finally, the third theme that I feel emerged from this study concerns how I (and the learners) were creating and actively participating in a translanguaging space facilitated by a teacher with a translanguaging stance. The work of Garcia's et al. (2017) explores translanguaging pedagogy and the concept of a "translanguaging stance" which is concerned with teachers' commitment to encouraging bilingualism. Garcia et al. (2017, p. 27) state "teachers cannot leverage translanguaging without the firm belief that bringing forth the students' entire language repertoires can transcend the language practices that have been traditionally valued." This stance views learners' first languages/language practices as a resource, and I would add, a right.

Meanwhile Li Wei (2016) asserts that humans have a translanguaging instinct (2016) which is an innate capacity to utilise the multifarious cognitive and semiotic resources available to make meaning. He suggests that it is this that pushes us to go beyond narrowly defined linguistic cues in order to move beyond (transcend) culturally defined language boundaries for effective communication to be achieved. A belief/stance and the idea of something being innate/instinctive might seem to some as being juxtaposed, but I do not believe that these are mutually exclusive ideas in the context of translanguaging. Teachers with a translanguaging stance are concerned with orchestrating and facilitating our *natural* way of communicating and making meaning. In doing so, they are creating a space for translanguaging practices (Li Wei, 2011). I would argue that by facilitating these interactions in my classroom there is of course a strategic and planned aspect to the way in which we communicate, but it is nevertheless naturally instinctive for us to use whatever resources we have available to make meaning, and certainly our shared sign language (BSL). In the context of our classroom I can only interpret *instinct* as our natural or intuitive way of communicating. This was evidenced by the learners who signed

whilst reading the English text alone or discuss it in BSL with another learner without prompting.

The idea of a translanguaging space allows for the creation of a social space where language users can “integrate social spaces that have formerly been separated through different practices in different places” (Li Wei, 2017, p. 23). The act of translanguaging he says, is a

social space for language users to consolidate and blend the various elements of themselves, for instance, their personal histories, their values, their attitudes etc. into a “single co-ordinated and meaningful performance” (Li Wei, 2017, p. 23).

Li likens the idea of a translanguaging space to that of a “Third Space” as described by Soja (1996) who was critical of binaries. These binaries probably refer to the earlier binaries of the home and the workplace (the first and second space) Oldenburg describes in his book “The Great Good Place” (1989) in contrast to the third space that anchor communities, those being the coffee shops, the hairdressers and the pub (to use a popular British term for a drinking establishment). Li Wei says that a translanguaging space acts as a third space for “invigorating languages with new possibilities” (2017, p. 24). He also adds that this has implications for pedagogical practice. In a space for translanguaging, teachers and learners can go between and beyond not only socially constructed language but also education structures and methods, transforming and challenging existing ones in order to generate new ones.

The idea of a translanguaging space might be thought of in a theoretical/conceptual way, but my classroom feels like a concrete space too. From the moment my learners and I enter the classroom and shut the door we have this theoretical “space” for our translanguaging practices and it constitutes a concrete physical space that we inhabit for those hours each week. It is a creative space where we are genuinely free to use all of our linguistic and additional semiotic resources to communicate and construct knowledge in whichever way we choose. I would argue that for my deaf learners a translanguaging space is also about a safe space. I use the word “safe” because the history of deaf education, not only in this country but in many countries around the world, has involved scenarios where deaf learners have been told to

sit on their hands, or have been punished for using a sign language, a consequence of the deleterious impact that the 1880 Milan Conference had on deaf education. The linguistic and cultural identity of deaf learners has often been rejected instead of nurtured and valued.

Garcia (2009) states that translanguaging is vital for developing identity and I would argue that acknowledging BSL as a named language and valuing it as a crucial and integral resource in my context is conducive for this. In doing so, it recognises and respects my learners' linguistic, social, political and cultural identities as sign language users and members of a deaf community, whereas previously they have not been. This can only be achieved within a space for translanguaging by teachers with a translanguaging stance.

Is it a requirement for the teacher to be a competent user of a sign language in order to facilitate a space for translanguaging? I struggle to imagine a scenario where a teacher of deaf adults (all sign language users) is not competent in a sign language themselves. My learners cannot hear the target language of English and the language of instruction needs to be BSL, a language that we all share. One of the findings of this study was the role of translation and how chaining was fundamental to concepts being bridged between English and BSL. If a teacher does not have the competency in both languages this can not be facilitated.

Conclusion

Investigations into translanguaging as they pertain to sign languages in the context of deaf education have been relatively under-researched. Therefore, this study sought to redress this by adding to the number of recently emerging studies and contributes to a clearer picture of translingual and multimodal communication. Specifically, it set out to provide a deeper understanding of how we utilise our linguistic and additional semiotic resources as part of a single repertoire to make meaning in the context of a language class. Further research is needed to continue to build upon our existing knowledge and understanding of multimodal-translingual practices among sign language users in the context of education.

Conflict of interests

I, Russell Aldersson, hereby declare that I do not have any potential conflict of interest in this study. I also confirm sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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