

Book Review *Using ESL Students' First Language to Promote College Success: Sneaking the Mother Tongue Through the Back Door* by Andrea Parmegiani

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Andrea Parmegiani's first monograph provides a compelling account for how utilizing the first language of language minority students (LMS) can play a fruitful role in their learning success at the tertiary level. *Using ESL Students' First Language to Promote College Success: Sneaking the Mother Tongue Through the Back Door* already suggests by its title that the persistence of monolingual English-only learning ideologies continue to marginalise second language learners in the United States. The fact that "sneaking in" of the mother tongue is needed makes us wonder how much of multilingualism as "the new linguistic dispensation" (Singleton et al.) has actually arrived at some colleges in the US.

This insightful book provides strategies for using the mother tongue as a resource in spite of sticking to monolingual orientations. These strategies emerged from a translanguaging program the author created by linking some of the ESL courses that he taught to Spanish composition courses for native speakers. As part of the link, he participated in the Spanish class as a language learner/participant observer to learn more about his students' primary language and literacy practices and to create more opportunities to translanguaging. Built around a case study of this program, this book provides a wealth of practical examples of how welcoming the mother tongue can help LMS to take ownership of English and succeed across the curriculum through the medium of this language.

Rich in qualitative and quantitative data, this book is of interest to any lecturer teaching LMS at an English medium institution, but in particular to college writing and academic literacy teachers who are eager to put academic success within reach of linguistically diverse students. While the study explores in depth the learning needs of a specific student population (recently immigrated Latinx students attending a community college in the US), the findings are relevant for other learning contexts where linguistic diversity coexists with English hegemony. This book builds on studies on bilingual education and culturally responsive pedagogy carried out in primary and secondary schools by showing the benefits of these pedagogical approaches for writing instruction and academic literacy development in post-secondary education. The empirical data presented shows that even among college students, there can be a transfer of literacy skills from their first to the second language if the mother tongue is used as part and parcel of a student-centered approach that values students' identities and cultural capital. To enhance this approach, Parmegiani suggests the notion of bidirectional learning (36), or the idea that English instructors should make the effort to learn their students' language. Educators cannot build on the linguistic-cultural resources students bring to the

classroom, he argues, without taking the time to familiarize themselves with these resources. He also shows that learning Spanish from his students helped reduce power asymmetries in the classroom and created fruitful opportunities for translanguaging practices where students were also able to resume roles of language experts .

The monograph is structured in five main chapters, excluding the introduction, which spans only a few pages but provides significant self-reflective details about Parmegiani's positionality as an LMS who has come to own English as an additional language. This first section "problematizes the notion that the United States has ever been a monolingual English-speaking country and addresses the issue of hostility toward linguistic diversity" (xiv). Chapter 1 begins with a historical review of language politics in the US, leading to a discussion of the current achievement gap and how it affects the Spanish-speaking population. The chapter concludes by detailing challenges and predicaments these LMS face throughout their educational careers in the US. Parmegiani calls on educators to tap into the broad linguistic resources these students have, instead of focusing on what they might lack.

In Chapter 2, the theoretical backbone of the study, Parmegiani provides the conceptual framework for understanding the implications of linguistic inequality for teachers of a dominant code (Standard English) with a dominant set of discourses (academic literacy). Drawing from Bourdieu's theory of the "linguistic market" and Gee's Discourse, he argues that LMS need to be provided access to the dominant language in order to succeed academically and professionally and fully participate in a society that is English dominated. At the same time, he also provides an comprehensive review of research on bilingual education and translanguaging studies to dispel the notion that learning how to acquire English academic literacy entails excluding the mother tongue from the learning process. Drawing on culturally responsive pedagogy, he warns against putting students in a "subtractive schooling" situation, where the acquisition of the language of power is presented as incompatible with the language that is a primary marker of identity.

In Chapter 3, Parmegiani begins the case study by narrating his translanguaging writing program as an embodiment of the pedagogical vision he outlined in the previous chapter. His story includes his strategies for dealing with monolingual orientations while pushing for linguistic diversity and a reflection on his initial motivation for taking in the Spanish class, a choice that led to the development of his bidirectional teaching approach. His narrative is set against the backdrop of Bronx Community College, a Hispanic-serving institution whose mission to "transform lives" is short circuited by the harsh socio-economic realities that shape the lives of many students.

Chapter 4 is the empirical basis of the monograph. Through the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods and analysis, Parmegiani provides a nuanced account of how his bilingual pedagogic implementations, while small-scaled, allowed students to attain higher academic success. Traditional metrics such as course pass rates, retention rates, and average GPAs showed that students who had the opportunity to use the mother tongue as a resource in the translanguaging writing program outperformed students who did not. Qualitative data collected through ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews showed the reason behind this better performance from the students' perspective. In particular, students' voices put a lot of emphasis on how the mother tongue supported the creation of a "safe space" and a "support system" (102) that facilitated English acquisition.

Students also mentioned how the translingual approach helped them master new vocabulary and unfamiliar college writing expectations.

The final chapter discusses the limitations of the study and its applicability to other learning contexts. This discussion includes suggestions for starting similar programs in universities at other Hispanic-Serving Institutions and schools where a sufficient number of language minority students share the same mother tongue to link first and second language writing courses. It also offers various strategies for applying translingual and bidirectional approaches to teaching. The book ends with an autobiographical note in which the author reflects on his personal experience in terms of appreciating diversity. In evoking the transformative powers of his teaching methods, he points to the ability to get close to his students, “in spite of fundamental differences in social identities markers that have a tendency to divide and antagonize humanity” (132). In his own words, he found “a place of closeness” with his students “where the common denominator we share as human beings was palpable” (132), to an extent that the learning process could be appreciated.

The monograph is a powerful contribution in applied linguistics and specifically to the fields of academic writing studies, translanguaging practices, TESOL, and culturally responsive pedagogy, and its lucid writing style is accessible to graduate students and junior scholars. Because it is based on data collected in the US, the study might not reflect many challenges occurring through English-medium tertiary education in postcolonial societies such as South Africa, where the reviewers' work is located. However, the dual position of teacher and language learner that Parmegiani navigates is hugely inspiring from a more general pedagogic perspective. The shifting of power relations within a classroom and the giving of agency to students can serve as important learning and teaching tools in many educational contexts. This monograph reflects a teacher's deep concern about the development and success of his LMS in an English hegemonic academic environment. Parmegiani's book is innovative and likely to have a positive effect on pedagogic measures for LMS in the United States.

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