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## Multimodal codemeshing: Bilingual adolescents' processes composing across modes and languages

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## ABSTRACT

With the growing linguistic diversity in today's classrooms, recent scholarship has begun to explore how multilingual students can use the full range of their linguistic repertoires when composing. At the same time, conceptions of writing have expanded to include multiple modes (e.g., text, images, sound, and movement). Addressing these tandem needs, this study examined how three bilingual eighth grade students composed across multiple languages and modalities – a process we call multimodal codemeshing – when creating a digital project. This comparative case study integrated translanguaging and social semiotics theoretical frameworks to understand students' multimodal codemeshing processes. Data sources included screen capture and video observations, student design interviews, and multimodal products. Findings revealed that students initiated their multimodal codemeshing processes through exploring the composing tool, collaborating with peers, and visually brainstorming. The process involved simultaneous iterative motion on multiple levels, including across modes, phases of the process, and sections of their projects. Students exhibited a range of textually-driven and visually-driven processes for creating content and followed unique compositional paths. Furthermore, students used their heritage languages for different purposes during the composing process. Along with becoming more fluent with digital tools and modes, students described increased comfort in using and sharing their heritage languages.

### 1. Introduction

With the growing linguistic diversity in today's classrooms (NCES, 2016), recent scholarship has begun to explore how bilingual students can use the full range of their linguistic repertoires when composing. Translanguaging pedagogies (Canagarajah, 2011; Cummins, 2005; García & Wei, 2014), or instruction that challenges boundaries between languages in the individual and boundaries between languages in classroom use, suggest the affordances associated with accessing, leveraging, and meshing multiple languages in different parts of the composing process. These affordances range from developing understandings of genre and voice (Martínez, 2010), planning and drafting (Velasco & García, 2014), to negotiating meaning with the reader (Canagarajah, 2011). Rather than bracketing off English in instruction (García, 2009), translanguaging pedagogies emphasize the productive ways that students and their teachers can use multiple and varied linguistic resources to support their literacy development (Working Group on ELL Policy, 2009).

At the same time, conceptions of writing in today's society have expanded with the digital horizon. Composing with digital tools

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often involves the fluid orchestration of multiple modes (e.g., writing, visuals, sound, movement) to create synergistic messages for a variety of authentic audiences. Multimodal composition disrupts the linear, static, and bounded constraints of written text to involve dynamic, interactive, and hyperlinked formats (Merchant, 2007). Research demonstrates that a growing majority of youth (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010) compose multimodally outside of school to express themselves and connect with others (Ito et al., 2010).

These shifts in pedagogy towards an expanded view of language and literacy emphasize an understanding of the learner who is both a critical consumer and a skillful producer of digital multimodal texts (Dalton, 2012). New policy initiatives reflect this view, stressing the need for all students to be able to communicate with multiple and diverse audiences and to use 21st century technologies to facilitate this process (e.g., in the U.S. context, Common Core State Standards National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010). While research has begun to show the communicative potential of leveraging multiple languages and modalities in students' digital products, there is a paucity of research showing how students move across languages and modalities during the composing process (however, see Toohey & Dagenais, 2015). For researchers and educators who seek to understand and then hone students' abilities to access and leverage the full range of their meaning-making toolkits, examining these processes is an urgent need.

With the lens that product and process are always interconnected and part of an ongoing negotiation of meaning with the reader (Canagarajah, 2011, 2013), we explore how students leverage and mesh multiple languages and modalities – a process we call *multimodal codemeshing* (Pacheco & Smith, 2015) – when creating a digital project during a literature unit. We describe these processes as part of multimodal composition, acknowledging that different modalities have unique communicative affordances (Kress, 2010) that can be amplified when juxtaposed. We also describe this process as part of codemeshing, or how individuals strategically use and mix multiple languages and modalities within written texts (Canagarajah, 2011, 2013). While work in both translanguaging and codemeshing has consistently described these practices as multimodal (see Fraiberg, 2010; García & Wei, 2014), we use the term *multimodal codemeshing* to emphasize the digital nature of using multiple languages and modalities in students' composing processes, and to distinguish this work from studies of L1 use in L2 writing processes and products (i.e., Keck, 2006; Wang & Wen, 2002). Building on Atkinson et al.'s (2015) arguments and Canagarajah's (2011, 2012, 2013) work with translanguaging practice, we view multimodal codemeshing as the use of multiple languages and modes in composing processes and products, where composers draw upon and mesh semiotic resources with varying degrees of intentionality (Dalton et al., 2015) and awareness to negotiate meaning with a reader.

In this study, we examine the multimodal codemeshing processes of three eighth grade students in the Southern United States who leveraged resources in English, Spanish, Bahdini, and Vietnamese when composing with text, visuals, sound, and animation in a digital environment. Our study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are eighth grade bilingual students' multimodal codemeshing processes?
2. How do bilingual students use their heritage languages during the multimodal codemeshing process?

Through comparative case methods (Stake, 2006), the goal of this study is to provide insights into the complexity and variation of students' processes as they compose across modes and languages.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2011; Garcia, 2009) and social semiotics (Halliday, 1978; Hodge & Kress, 1988) lenses guide our understandings of multimodal codemeshing processes.

### 2.1. Translanguaging in writing

We build on theories of translanguaging to describe how students leverage multiple resources from an integrated language system, and how this leveraging is responsive to interlocutors and contexts of use. Translanguaging suggests that an individual's semiotic resources are part of one holistic repertoire that the individual can strategically draw upon as communicative contexts change (Canagarajah, 2012; Garcia, 2009). In students' written products, these varied and often divergent linguistic resources can be deployed for a variety of purposes, such as aligning the author with specific discourse communities (Velasco & García, 2014), conveying nuances in meaning (Martínez, 2010), engaging multiple audiences (Pacheco & Smith, 2015), and amplifying an author's intended message (Stille & Prasad, 2015).

Though research in multilingual writing has described the ways that a students' first language can support or interfere with writing processes in a second language (for a review, see van Weijen, van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, & Sanders, 2009), we position translanguaging in writing as an author's purposeful leveraging of semiotic resources from this integrated language system. Recent work has suggested the communicative potential of codemeshing, especially within digital contexts and in conjunction with other modalities. Hinrichs and White-Sustaíta (2011), for example, explored translanguaging within email writing at the graphemic level, showing how individuals can use non-standard spellings of words in English and Jamaican-Creole to challenge reader's attitudes about language prestige. Canagarajah (2011) investigated translanguaging at the phrasal level and showed how meshing Arabic, English, and text symbols could express students' voice and identities, as well as promote reader engagement. Sebba's (2013) analysis of a multilingual and multimodal text, a poster written in Greek and English, showed how translanguaging can engage multiple readers of different linguistic proficiencies simultaneously as they engage with an entire assemblage of modalities and languages.

This research suggests the communicative potential within multilingual and multimodal products. Framing this composition as

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