

Envisioning TESOL Through a Translanguaging Lens: Global Perspectives

ZHONGFENG TIAN,
LAILA AGHAI, PETER SAYER & JAMIE L. SCHISSEL (EDS.)

Springer, 2020

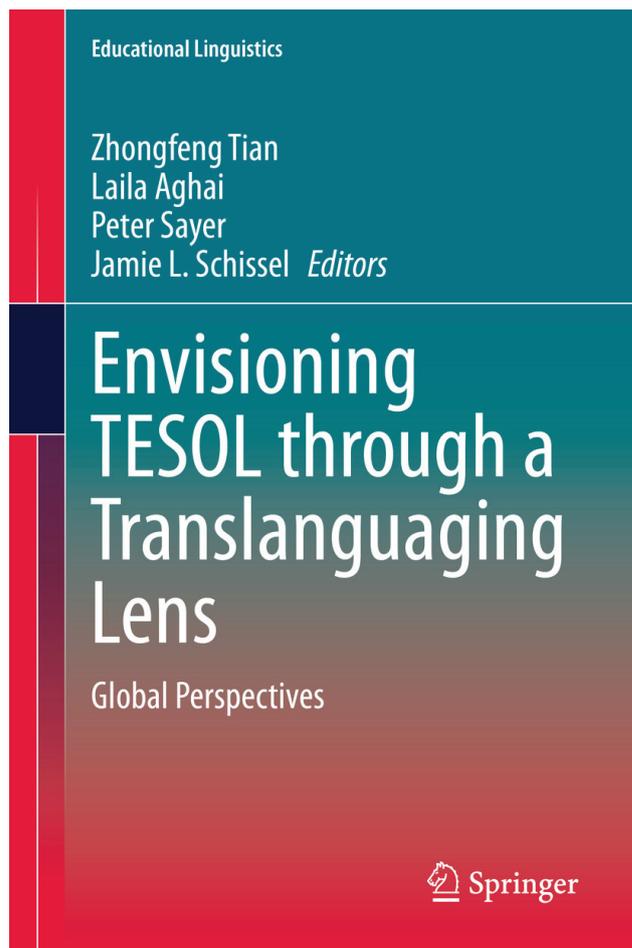
REVIEWED BY SKYE PLAYSTED

If you are ready to challenge your views and practices about how language is used in English language classrooms, reading this book will provide you with plenty of thought-provoking material to assist you in your endeavours. With each chapter, the authors confront established views of language usage and teaching practice in TESOL. You, like I, may have heard classroom practitioners, managers and academics express strong views about students' first language (L1) usage in class. This volume highlights the need for some commonly held views about second language acquisition (SLA) to be redefined, if translanguaging is to become more widely understood and embedded in TESOL teacher education, research and classroom practices.

As you read the book, it is worth taking time to reflect on your current teaching beliefs and practices in relation to the concepts introduced by the various authors. I did this, and soon realised that my understanding of translanguaging had been limited to seeing it only as a scaffolding strategy to help learners progress from their L1 to their L2. More importantly, translanguaging is a theory and practice that empowers multilingual students to value and use language as a tool for social justice. In this book, it is viewed through theoretical, descriptive and pedagogical lenses in relation to teacher training as well as classroom practice in TESOL. The sections of the book are structured to introduce readers to translanguaging theory, to discuss examples of its use in TESOL teacher education, and to give practical examples of translanguaging in different classroom contexts.

The three chapters in Part I of the book give a theoretical overview of translanguaging. Seltzer and Garcia describe translanguaging as a pedagogical stance (the beliefs that we hold as we approach our work with bi/multilinguals), a design (how we organise

the physical space, the curriculum, instruction and assessment in our classrooms to foreground translanguaging), and shifts (in our thinking, to move away from being the 'linguistic expert' (p. 26) towards becoming co-learners with our students). In Chapter 3, Sembiente and Tian challenge readers to recognise that the field of TESOL has traditionally promoted monolingual approaches to teaching English, rather than promoted multilingual ones that valorise students' multilingual competencies. The authors assert that the process of learning English for bi/multilinguals is not linear, and the outcome of learning English is not to become a monolingual English



user. Rather, a translanguaging approach recognises that 'English . . . is only one of the languages in teachers' and students' rich language repertoires' (p. 60). I also found the fourth chapter of the book helpful, as it summarised the historical background to the monolingual dominance of English in TESOL. In this chapter, Hall describes how European- and US-dominated English teaching methodologies promoted conducting classroom activities only in English, and how this has influenced research, practice and teacher training in TESOL.

In Part II, Chapters 5–10 describe shifts in thinking experienced by pre-service and in-service teachers, when introduced to translanguaging theory, stance and design in TESOL

teacher education programs. In Chapter 7, teacher educators are encouraged to model justice-focused teaching by moving away from an English-only approach in their classes, and the chapter includes translanguaging strategies that can be incorporated into lessons. Chapter 8 describes a study that compared three assessment tasks using translanguaging in their design, with those that used an English-only approach. The findings revealed a trend towards increased achievement by multilingual students in assessment tasks which allowed them to use their other languages.

Chapter 9 will be of particular interest to teachers who have worked in Australian

schools. In this chapter, Turner explored shifts in Australian primary school teachers' beliefs about translanguaging over the course of a year, as teachers engaged in professional learning about translanguaging approaches. Turner cautions against taking an 'additive approach' to translanguaging in the school context, i.e., the attitude that students can use their home language at home, but that at school, it's English only. Chapter 10 highlights a need for 'decolonizing the mind' (p. 206) from a post-colonial mindset of English as a superior language. In this chapter, a bilingual Malawian teacher forced to speak in a different language at school (at a time when students and teachers in Malawian schools were required to speak in English rather than their L1) sums up the experience with the statement: 'I felt my voice is taken away' (p. 215).

Part III of the book looks at translanguaging practices in TESOL classrooms. Chapter 13 highlights the common ground which exists between translanguaging as a theory and the principles of task-based learning and teaching. Galante then reports on a study that explored the use of translanguaging in a Canadian EAP program that had previously relied on a largely 'English only' approach to teaching. This chapter highlights tensions within TESOL in relation to translanguaging, for example, where a student may be engaging in translanguaging in an EAP classroom context while preparing for high stakes English language tests that are dominated by English-only approaches to teaching. In the final chapter of the book, Sayer confronts traditional views of translanguaging that need to be addressed in the field of TESOL. These include views such as a student's L1 being 'at best a crutch and at worst an impediment to L2 learning', a source of 'negative transfer', and the use of language mixing by students as an indicator of 'laziness and lack of education' (p. 366).

On reflection, I realise that I began reading this book in search of a single, simple definition of translanguaging and a 'how to do translanguaging' manual for TESOL practitioners. However, by the time I finished the book, I was pleased to note that I was left with more questions than answers. Some of these include: How can we assess students' progress in English in a way that is consistent with a translanguaging approach? How do we teach in a way that actively moves away from traditional views of SLA? What steps do I need to take as a teacher to develop a translanguaging stance, and put this into practice? There are no simple, one-size-fits-all answers to these questions, and although this book offers many examples of translanguaging in classroom practice, its primary aim is to challenge practitioners to ask themselves questions and confront assumptions about language learning and teaching. Although the editors suggest that this is a book for language teachers and students in the field of TESOL, many of the 17 chapters are written in an academic style. If you are teaching in a school with a strict 'English-only' policy, you may gain a lot from

reading the theoretical chapters in the first part of the book, but may not find the examples and suggestions for classroom practice throughout the later chapters as relevant to your own practice. The book's hefty retail price tag of AU\$174.54 for the e-book or AU\$191.08 for the hardcover limits its potential readership, however I would highly recommend it to teachers and teacher educators who are developing their understanding of translanguaging in the field of TESOL.

Skye Playsted is a teacher and PhD candidate who lives in Brisbane, Australia. She teaches in schools, universities, and English language programs, and is particularly interested in working with preliterate adults who are learning English for the first time. Skye is active in professional communities such as ACTA, LESLLA and the JALT Mind Brain Education SIG.

skye.playsted@englishlanguageresources.com.au