Biliteracy of African American and Latinx Kindergarten Students in a Dual-Language Program: Understanding Students’ Translanguaging Practices Across Informal Assessments

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Abstract
This article uses a translanguaging framework, together with critical case sampling and qualitative analysis, to explore how six students approached literacy in an integrated dual-language (DL) program in a low-income, working-class, predominantly African American school. Students’ translanguaging practices encompassed a broad repertoire of features that included home language, academic language, metalinguistic awareness, and lived experiences across home, school, and community contexts—many of which likely to go unexamined with traditional standardized testing. Educators working with

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minoritized DL students are encouraged to adopt a translanguaging lens when assessing students’ bilingualism and biliteracy to more fully capture students’ linguistic repertoire.

**Keywords**

bilingual education, dual-language education, African American students, Latinx students, translanguaging, bilingual assessment, urban education

U.S. public school students have become more culturally and linguistically diverse (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014), given that Latinxs have surpassed African Americans as the largest minority group in the nation (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). The makeup of the Latinx community is diverse and includes people with ties to the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, to name a few. This demographic phenomenon has brought about salient and relatively sudden changes to the demographics of public schools across the country (Colomer, 2014, 2015), including schools in traditionally African American communities (Neal & Bohon, 2003).

This article examines the literacy performance of six African American and Latinx students (some of whom are racially mixed) enrolled in a two-way dual-language (DL) program that encouraged dynamic bilingualism, a pedagogical approach, which affirms that students should draw on their rich linguistic repertoire to learn critically and creatively (García & Wei, 2014). DL classrooms combine students with two different home languages (e.g., English and Spanish) to develop reading, writing, speaking, listening, and comprehension of one another’s language over time.

Echoing Milner (2010), we address the education of African American and Latinx students from an opportunity gap perspective rather than an achievement gap perspective. Instead of blaming the students and families of historically marginalized and minoritized populations, we argue that sociopolitical issues related to race, language, and other social constructs deprive these students of equitable opportunities to succeed. Thus, we purposefully use the term minoritized throughout this article to underscore the social construction of subordination of African American and Latinx students in U.S. social institutions (Harper, 2013), in particular, K-12 schools.

Evidence suggests that DL instruction can address the opportunity gap by offering an enriching classroom environment that supports marginalized youth as capable learners (Holobow, Genesee, & Lambert, 1991; Lightbown, 2007). DL programs have existed in the United States since the early 1960s, but the current proliferation began in 2000 (García & Kleifgen, 2010). Despite this
growth, very few African American students have had the opportunity to participate in these programs. According to the Center of Applied Linguistics (n.d.), only 13 of the 335 schools that offer DL programs in the United States report having significant numbers of African American students. Given the evidence that DL programs may address the opportunity gap, research into African American students’ languaging in such programs may benefit the U.S. school system’s ability to serve these students. Assessment plays a significant role in shaping classroom instruction; for this reason, it merits our attention (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Whitford & Jones, 2000).

In this article, we document six minoritized students’ bilingual and biliteracy performance on two informal assessments as they approached the end of their first year in a DL program to explore what analyzing their bilingualism and biliteracy through a translanguaging lens might reveal. Bilingualism has often been described as linguistic proficiency in two separate languages, whereas biliteracy reflects literacy skills across two languages (Bauer & Colomer, 2016). Specifically, the following questions guided our study:

**Research Question 1:** How are these DL students translanguaging during informal assessments?

**Research Question 2:** What insights can these DL students’ translanguaging practices across informal assessments reveal?

**Theoretical Framework**

This study takes a sociocultural approach toward bilingualism. We explore dynamic bilingualism, in particular, translanguaging, to study how African American and Latinx DL kindergarten students draw from their linguistic repertoire to engage their multilingual identities during end-of-year reading assessments.

Williams (1996) based his theory of translanguaging on Cummins’ (1979) theories of linguistic interdependence, which underscored the dynamic interrelationships that exist in the *languaging* of bilinguals (García, Flores, & Chu, 2011), a term that refers to language actions and practices and the context in which they exist (García & Wei, 2014). Some studies show that when bilinguals use one language, the other language remains active and can be easily accessed (Hoshino & Thierry, 2011; Wu & Thierry, 2010). Additional studies reveal how bilingual speakers’ languages interact collaboratively when they listen and speak with one another (De Groot, 2011). Translanguaging permits the planned and systematic use of two languages for teaching and learning in the classroom (Baker, 2011; Williams, 1996). Therefore, the original pedagogical functions of translanguaging required purposeful alternation of languages in receptive and productive modes (Hornberger & Link, 2012).
Grounded in Heller’s (2007) social approach toward bilingualism and building on Williams’ (1996) notion of translanguaging, García (2009) proposed applying the framework to educate emergent bilinguals and couched it within the frame of *dynamic bilingualism*, in which bilinguals draw from a single linguistic system with innumerable linguistic features. García et al. (2011) regarded translanguaging as an “approach to bilingualism that is centered not on languages, but on the observable communicative practices of bilinguals” (p. 5). As a result, translanguaging affords students the opportunity to engage in flexible pedagogical practices to make sense of their experiences, thereby strengthening their multilingual identities (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012).

Translanguaging remains the most prevalent practice among bilingual students in classrooms, as they flexibly draw from their rich linguistic repertoire despite teachers’ direction on when and how they should use languages (García, 2009). A translanguaging lens suggests that strict separation of language in bilingual programs is problematic because it essentializes complex multilingual identities by creating binary categorizations (e.g., bilingual/monolingual, Spanish/English). The dynamic nature of translanguaging theory contributes to our understanding of how both African American and Latinx kindergarten students experienced a Spanish/English DL program.

**Literature Review**

This section has a dual focus—first, to highlight the current literature related to the educational achievement of African American and Latinx youth in DL programs, and second, to review the connection between translanguaging and assessment. It is well established that DL education can provide the strongest form of bilingual programming for emergent bilingual youth (Francis, Lesaux, & August, 2006; García, 2009; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 2002, 2009). Moreover, scholars have found positive outcomes in relation to academic achievement of emergent bilinguals in DL programs, such as higher test scores (Christian, Lindholm, Montone, & Carranza, 1997; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Pérez, 2004; Thomas & Collier, 2002), higher rates of high school graduation and college attendance (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2001), and more positive attitudes toward other cultures and languages (Cazabon, Lambert, & Hall, 1993; Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Although the research is clear in relation to the success of DL programming for emergent bilingual Latinx youth, much less is known about how DL programs can serve African American students (see Bauer, Presiado, & Colomer, 2017, for more discussion).
African American DL Students

Studies suggest minoritized students derive benefit from DL programs (Holobow et al., 1991; Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003; Lightbown, 2007; Thomas & Collier, 2009). Thomas and Collier’s (2009) statewide evaluation of North Carolina’s DL programs found that the academic performance on standardized tests in English of African American and Latinx students enrolled in DL programs was better than their counterparts not enrolled in DL programs. Nevertheless, issues of systemic inequity related to the racial and linguistic identities of minoritized students can generally outweigh the pedagogical benefits of DL programs in some settings (Bender, 2000; Krause, 1999; Palmer, 2010; Valdés, 2002; Wiese, 2004). For example, Bender (2000) highlighted that many teachers held misconceptions about the process of language learning, lacked sufficient preparation to serve a multiracial student body, and held implicit deficit views toward students’ language practices and racial identities. These mixed results point to the importance of investigating translanguaging practices across informal assessments for educators to understand how African American and Latinx DL students engage with texts when they gauge their students’ biliteracy skills.

The traditional dichotomous ways in which most DL programs categorize students into English-dominant or Spanish-dominant groups may present structural barriers to the success of African American students (Cummins, 2000; Freeman & Freeman, 2000; Krause, 1999; Valdés, 1997). Palmer (2010) cautions that even when schools attempt to bridge students’ cultural and linguistic differences, unexamined policies and practices may create unequal access and learning opportunities for African American students. Palmer (2010) suggests that issues related to language varieties and the privileging of a more “standard record” of English may have played a stronger part in the miseducation of African American students in DL programs (p. 96).

The limited studies on the potential obstacles for African American students in DL programs tend to focus on teachers’ ideologies. Bender (2000) and Wiese (2004) both explored the attitudes and beliefs that DL teachers held about African American students’ language use and found that teachers held deficit attitudes about students of color in general, believing that African American students could not be bilingual and biliterate in English and Spanish. Similarly, Scanlan and Palmer (2009) found that teachers believed African Americans were limited in their English as speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and, therefore, overlooked their translanguaging potential.
Latinx DL Students

Research also shows that DL programs may not be a panacea for Latinx students (Valdés, 1997; Varghese & Park, 2010). Potowski (2007) examined the experiences of students in the oldest DL immersion program in the Midwest and found that although the school was successful in providing Latinx students with certain knowledge, support, and opportunities (e.g., comfort when reflecting on issues of race and class, ability to perform on district- and state-level English academic assessments, and manageable levels of Spanish proficiency), by the time Latinx students graduated from the DL program in eighth grade, they were not using Spanish at all for social interactions, which negatively affected students’ interpersonal relationships with Spanish-speaking family members.

Cervantes-Soon (2014) called into question the motives and the neoliberal agenda behind many two-way DL programs that integrate White middle-class students with Latinx youth. The author argued that educators treated Latinx youth as models for the benefit of White students enjoying a Eurocentric curriculum; thus, they excluded most African American students.

Translanguaging and Assessment

A small and powerful body of work analyzes literacy development from a translanguaging lens, capturing the complexity of bilingual assessment practices. For example, García (2009) and Shohamy (2011) found that emergent bilinguals are often assessed with monolingual assessments. Similarly, Ascenzi-Moreno (2016) found that, in assessing student biliteracy development, the teachers did not look across the two languages to consider how students utilized both languages in unique ways. In other words, assessment has remained dichotomized even in circumstances where pedagogical practices embraced DL programing and translanguaging. In this study, informal assessments were used to account for translanguaging as minoritized DL students interacted with text.

In a separate study, Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015) highlighted how teachers often confused the assessment of students’ degree of bilingualism (via translanguaging) with assessing language proficiency in one language or the other. Narrative assessment analyses reveal common findings across English and Spanish development, such as the progressive increase of vocabulary usage and linguistic complexity over time, as well as differences, such as the development of particular linguistic forms of language that are unique to the structures of the target language (Bedore, & Goldstein, 2004; Berman
In their study of English narrative skills, Gámez, Lesaux, and Rizzo (2015) found that macrostructure skills, such as organizing and sequencing a story, were similar in bilingual and monolingual students, but young bilinguals developed microstructure skills, such as speech planning and grammatical structures, at different rates than monolinguals. Gorman, Bingham, Fiestas, and Terry (2016) emphasized the critical importance of understanding the differences across the two languages and the dangers of simply translating assessments, which do not necessarily reflect appropriate language development across English and Spanish.

According to Kabuto and Velasco (2016), biliteracy can be understood, in part, as a sociopsycholinguistic practice that captures how students actively construct their understanding of text using multiple linguistic cuing systems (i.e., semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic), reflects how students mediate their world through text, and constructs “an interpretive framework for defining . . . readers within the social structures of home and school” (p. 20). Through the use of reading miscue analysis, students are better able to display how they access literacy information in one language and articulate their understanding about the content and language form in another language. Kabuto and Velasco (2016) documented that through analysis of retrospective miscue analysis, immigrant parents and their children reading together revealed that both engaged in shared metalinguistic interactions, developed word knowledge across both languages, and fostered each other’s comprehension of text. We concur with Kabuto (2016) that reading miscue analysis can provide a window into bilingual reading behaviors even when students are engaged in reading text written in one language. For that reason, we conducted reading miscue analysis on students’ reading aloud.

Otheguy et al. (2015) suggest that if educators allowed students’ entire linguistic identity to be fully present in their assessment practices, proficiency assessments would be more accurate and complete. Teachers often view linguistically minoritized students’ language skills as subpar when gauged by standardized norms; a translanguaging lens would better illuminate students’ biliteracy and bilingual development. This study models assessment practices that allow DL students to tap into their entire linguistic identity. To this end, we include young children’s oral narrative assessments because they have been recognized as reliable measures of children’s complex language development (Justice, Bowles, Pence, & Gosse, 2010; Paris & Paris, 2003; Pearson, 2002).

Research identifies risks associated with oral language proficiency assessments when assessors do not account for the differences across students’
languages and their degree of bilingualism. Macswan, Rolstad, and Glass (2002) critiqued the use of oral language proficiency assessments that isolated language development into concrete descriptions such as nonspeaker, limited speaker, and fluent speaker. They decry the use of assessments that operate in rigid and standardize ideologies and assign scores to young bilinguals’ oracy while ignoring the linguistically complex identities of bilinguals across multiple languages. In their study, students were often mislabeled as a nonspeaker of a language, suggesting zero competence, as a consequence. Macswan, Rolstad, and Glass (2002) revealed that monolinguals and bilinguals develop language differently. Assessing young bilinguals’ language and literacy development without understanding these differences provides incorrect results. Rather than looking at young bilinguals’ production in one language, a translanguaging approach could shed light on what they are able to do bilingually.

Given the limited research into the dynamic bilingual practices of African American and Latinx youth together in DL programs, we know very little with regard to how these minoritized DL students utilize their translanguaging skills when engaging in literacy assessments. To better understand how these two student groups approach literacy from a translanguaging lens, we examined closely how six young Latinx and African American DL students utilized their linguistic repertoires during informal literacy assessments.

**Method**

**School Context**

We examined the performance of six emergent bilingual students on informal assessments at the end of their first academic year in a DL classroom at Potter Elementary, a Midwestern school that enrolled 353 students during the 2012-2013 school year (all names and locations are pseudonyms). Potter Elementary fits the *urban characteristic* definition provided by Milner (2012), such that the school has experienced the challenges that are sometimes associated with urban settings in metropolitan areas. Its student population was African American (58.7%), White (20.7%), Latino (10.5%), mixed race (8.5%), and Asian (0.3%). Some Latinx students were bused from a nearby community to attend the DL program; other Latinx students, mixed-race students, and all African American students lived in the low-income/working-class neighborhood around the school. Potter became one of two schools to have DL programs in the district in 2012, following a district vote to transition the district from transitional bilingual education (TBE) to DL instruction to meet the needs of the growing Latinx student population. The other school, Baxter
Elementary, served a predominately White middle-class neighborhood and had provided TBE programs for Spanish-speaking students in the past (Potter had not). The school board voted to have one of the two DL programs at Baxter Elementary by a large margin, but accepted the proposal to have a DL program at Potter Elementary by a margin of one vote.

Potter Elementary is considered a low-income school, in that 88% of all students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The DL program started in one first-grade and two kindergarten classrooms; since then, the school has expanded the program through fifth grade and plans to grow the program through high school. The number of students in DL classrooms ranged from 18 to 23. To meet the goal of having roughly equal numbers of English-dominant (approximately 40%) and Spanish-dominant (60%) students in the program, the district needed to identify students by their dominant language. Of the English-dominant speakers, 65% were African American or multiracial and 35% were White. The district, following state law, based their classification on parents’ indication on the Home Language Survey (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.) of their students’ language dominance, which validated parents’ voices in the decision-making process. However, the district, in some ways, continued to reify the binaries associated with home language.

Students were formally assessed in English with the World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (2008) Model Screener if parents indicated a language other than English on the survey. If students scored “limited” based on state-mandated cutoff scores, the students were identified as native Spanish-speaking English-language learners. The district also used the Spanish PreLas (De Avila & De Duncan, 1998) for those whose parents listed them as Spanish speaking. The school did not assess the language proficiency (Spanish or English) of students whose Home Language Survey (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.) indicated they spoke only English. Not assessing and establishing a baseline for all English speakers indirectly favored English as the default “valued” language and, therefore, marked non–English home languages as other. English became a goal for Spanish-dominant students, whereas no such Spanish-language targets were implied for English-dominant students, even in a context that valued bilingualism and biliteracy enough to implement a comprehensive DL program.

The Classroom

We focused on one classroom, Ms. Sanchez’s kindergarten, to limit the issue of variability across teachers (Allington, 2002; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Ms. Sanchez who had 18 students in her classroom conducted 90% of
her instruction in Spanish. English was used when students had library time, art, and music. Lunchroom management was also conducted in English. Ms. Sanchez expected all students, regardless of home language, to participate in Spanish literacy activities.

Ms. Sanchez used strategies such as cooperative instruction groups as a means to celebrate all her students’ linguistic abilities. Because there were multiple opportunities for students to interact and engage in literacy practices using all their resources, students could take part in translanguaging without retribution (see Bauer et al., 2017, for more discussion). Students participated in such activities as looking for high-frequency words, reading and responding to a text independently, writing about their favorite part of a book after listening to a story, matching syllables games, and participating in sight word hunts. These activities filled much of the day and all students were actively encouraged to maximally mobilize the linguistic skills they were developing in both languages; in other words, translanguaging was part of the entire interdisciplinary curriculum.

Participants

Because it is important to “yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge” (Patton, 2001, p. 236), we used critical case sampling (Morse, 1994) to select six target students to include equal numbers of students identified as English dominant and Spanish dominant by their parents at the beginning of the year, and represented the range of demographics present in the classroom: African Americans, Biracials, Whites, and Latinxs (of Mexican descent). The six students also represented the language continuum found in Ms. Sanchez’s kindergarten classroom (see Table 1).

The six target students exemplify the limitations of using binary terminology to describe language, socioeconomic status (SES), race, and ethnicity. For example, neither Tamara (African American) nor Gabrielle (biracial) had family members who spoke Spanish, and their mothers indicated they spoke only English at home. Both children attended English-speaking preschool in the district. However, both had exposure to AAVE and mainstream American English (MAE) in their community and academic English from other students, but of the two, only Tamara heard AAVE at home. Ayame was also identified as English dominant by her African American mother, but Ayame’s home language was more complex. Her Mexican father had spoken Spanish to her since birth, but her mother reported Ayame answered her father in English. It is likely that Ayame was also exposed to AAVE in school and in the community. As the language backgrounds of just these three children
show, binary terminology fails to capture the rich and complex diversity of language and dialect exposure, knowledge, and use. Parents—and frequently educators—often lack the awareness of the full range of their own language environments, much less the lexicon to describe language and dialect exposure, use, and fluency.

The parents of the three participants (Reina, Joslyn, and Angel) who had designated their children as Spanish-dominant speakers expected them to learn English and maintain their Spanish skills in their DL classroom. All three students had older school-aged siblings who likely introduced English to varying degrees in the home. Angel’s mother was confident that he would maintain his Spanish because he used it with her; she also reported that he sometimes translated and interpreted for her. English, therefore, played a role in all these children’s lives and even in their family relationships. Again, these examples illustrated the rich tapestry of languages, dialects, and registers used by bilingual children. Because all the children in the study existed in linguistic environments that defied dichotimization, translanguaging provides an excellent framework for examining their biliteracy development.

### Table 1. Students’ Languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of students’ languages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ayame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joslyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamara</td>
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*Note: AAVE= African American vernacular english.*
Data Collection

Data were collected in May 2013, as Potter’s first DL academic year concluded. A Spanish–English bilingual graduate student assisted the first author with data collection. For the purpose of this article, we interviewed the teacher and created and utilized two informal assessments that took into account bilingualism and translanguaging—unlike most language assessments that assess dichotomized language dominance. The use of both instruments provided seminal insights into the role of translanguaging in the literacy development of minoritized DL students’ understanding of their own language and literacy performance.

The first assessment provided data on oral construction of a story using pictures as cues as well as their “thinking aloud” or “narrative commentary” as they used translanguaging to navigate the text. To capture students’ knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, we individually assessed each student in a quiet space and asked them to narrate in Spanish the story depicted in the wordless picture book Qué Buen Perro, Carlos (Good Dog, Carl) (see online supplemental materials). Students previewed their wordless picture book by doing a picture walk (using the illustrations to develop a sense of the story content prior to narrating the text). The students’ narration ranged from 10 to 20 minutes, depending on the details and complexity students introduced. All narrations were audio recorded and transcribed by a Spanish-English bilingual.

The second assessment provided students with written text and asked them to read aloud. Students’ miscues (misreading of the written print) were documented (see Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005, for more information on reading miscue analysis). Students also read two stories aloud in Spanish at grade level (Nos Gusta Nadar [We Like to Swim], La Escalera de Mano de Lucas [Luke’s Own Ladder]) and were asked to retell what they read. If a student had difficulty continuing to read after a miscue, then the researcher supplied the word. Questions followed the reading of each text (e.g., What happened in the story?). The interviewer kept a running record of each of the two readings and conducted a miscue analysis (Goodman et al., 2005) to capture the types of miscues students made (i.e., substitutions, omissions) and their ability to tell a coherent story in Spanish. This assessment also captured students’ sense of story, which has been linked to comprehension (Morrow, 1985). All assessments were conducted in Spanish, audio recorded, and transcribed.
We utilized qualitative case studies (Patton, 1990; Yin, 1989) because contexts matter (Stake, 1994). Detailed descriptions of a small number of cases, although not generalizable, provided contextual richness and depth to uncover trends that otherwise may have remained undiscovered. We read and reread the transcripts of each student’s narrations. The first time through the storytelling data, we tried to capture the degree to which the storytelling was comprehensible through a holistic analysis. To better understand what students were doing, we looked at sentence structure, the words used, and the various means by which students approached each task. Furthermore, we looked for patterns within and across the students. Five themes emerged: a text-driven or fantasy approach to the narration, code-switching, self-talk, use of entire linguistic repertoire, and use of internal monitor for clarification (see Table 2).

With the narrative texts, we noted the number of miscues (graphophonetic, syntactic, and semantic misreadings), and whether students self-corrected these miscues, to document how they monitored themselves as they read. Analysis of print reading miscues focused on whether miscues were omissions or substitutions (Goodman et al., 2005) and what these patterns revealed about students’ Spanish (and to some degree English) language skills. The texts read were then classified at three levels: independent (text that can be

<table>
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<th>Description of themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text driven to fantasy</td>
<td>Students approached retelling on a continuum that ranged from text driven to fantasy. Students who depended on a text-driven approach focused more on describing the pictures, and those who took to fantasy embellished the retelling of the story to a greater extent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code-switching</td>
<td>The purposeful use of both codes to communicate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-talk</td>
<td>Students used the strategy of self-talk to negotiate across their languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic repertoire</td>
<td>Students used language across codes and across modalities, including nonverbal forms of communication, to insure they were understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal monitor for clarification</td>
<td>Students used their own internal monitor as they mulled through languages on their own. This monitoring supported students in deciding whether their communication needed repairing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

We utilized qualitative case studies (Patton, 1990; Yin, 1989) because contexts matter (Stake, 1994). Detailed descriptions of a small number of cases, although not generalizable, provided contextual richness and depth to uncover trends that otherwise may have remained undiscovered. We read and reread the transcripts of each student’s narrations. The first time through the storytelling data, we tried to capture the degree to which the storytelling was comprehensible through a holistic analysis. To better understand what students were doing, we looked at sentence structure, the words used, and the various means by which students approached each task. Furthermore, we looked for patterns within and across the students. Five themes emerged: a text-driven or fantasy approach to the narration, code-switching, self-talk, use of entire linguistic repertoire, and use of internal monitor for clarification (see Table 2).

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read without assistance), instructional (text that can be read better with teacher support), or frustrational (text beyond student’s reading level that is likely to frustrate). Student responses to comprehension questions were analyzed for accuracy based on anticipated answers. Rigor was established by contrasting target students’ results across both informal assessments.

Findings

In our presentation of each student, we provide data excerpts to illustrate students’ languaging and translanguaging and to point out each student’s approach to retelling Que Buen Perro, Carlos. We provide miscue analysis data and include the length of students’ retelling because they reflect their ability to stay in the language and the complex nature of their language use. The data revealed to what degree each student used translanguaging across informal assessments and provided insights about minoritized DL students’ reading practices.

Angel’s retelling of a wordless book. Angel, who speaks Spanish at home with his parents and reported speaking some English with siblings, took a straightforward approach to retelling. He provided the shortest narration (189 words) and exhibited a strong grasp of vocabulary, but a storyline was missing from his retelling.

El perro abrió la puerta para el bebé, y el perro está corriendo . . . El perro está arreglando las cosas. El perro está acostado. [The dog opened the door for the baby, and the dog is running . . . The dog is arranging things. The dog is lying down.]

Angel’s text-driven approach to retelling the story provided less weaving of a storyline and his thoughts were often incomplete, reflecting a more conversational approach (MacSwan, Rolstad, & Glass, 2002). While telling the story, Angel once paused to ask, “¿Qué es eso?” (What is that?) because he could not identify an image. For Angel, the text, in this case the images, was the driving force for completing the task. Given that Ms. Sanchez identified Angel as a good print-based reader, it is possible that he did not view the storytelling task as a legitimate literacy activity. In terms of Angel’s translanguaging, this example reveals the limitations for him of using illustrations as part of literacy development. Although his singular linguistic system clearly allowed for flexibility with English and Spanish, it seems to have stopped short of including images as part of his languaging repertoire.
**Angel narrating a Spanish text.** Angel’s total error scores on the miscue analysis were frustration (87%) and instructional (90%) on *Nos Gusta Nadar* and *La Escalera de Mano de Lucas*, respectively. After self-correction, however, he was able to read both texts at the independent level (Text 1, 96%; Text 2, 97%). Angel’s reading miscues mostly occurred at the beginning of the text because once he had decoded a word, he did not have to decode it again. If he stumbled on a word, Angel self-corrected immediately or employed syllable decoding, indicating he monitored himself as he read. At one point—likely as a result of his familiarity with the word “más” as a native Spanish speaker—he tried to decode the word *demasiado* (too much) by saying “de.mas.i.ado” instead of the syllabic breakdown expected as a result of instruction “de-ma-sia-do.” Like most of his other uses of syllable decoding, this one proved effective, which demonstrated his ability to add words to his sight vocabulary.

**Ayame’s retelling of a wordless book.** Ayame, spoke English with her mother and over the course of the year started speaking Spanish with her father, gave herself the literary license to view text as fantasy. Providing the second longest narration (531 words), her imagination kept to a storyline even though her narrations often did not match the pictures in the text. Thus, she interpreted the scene where the baby took a powder puff and applied powder to the dog’s cheek as a magical moment, which placed both characters in a make-believe world: “La bebé puso magia en su cachete, que es pink. Sí es rosa.” (The baby put magic on his cheek, that is pink. Yes, it is pink.) She concluded her retelling by saying, “The baby cried, ‘¡No!, ¡No!, ¡No me quedo aquí!’” (No! No! I won’t stay here!).

Ayame inserted the English word *pink* as a placeholder while she reflected on her selection. During the reflective process, Ayame replaced *pink* with its Spanish translation *rosa*. Ayame also used metalanguage to clarify her use of the feminine article as she read, “la bebé, porque es una niña” (The baby, because it is a girl). Her ability to consciously work through her own questions about one language by calling on the other while her unified linguistic system processed the negotiation is a testament to the power of translanguaging in literacy development. Moreover, Ayame’s storytelling approach underscores how a DL classroom can make explicit languaging possible when students are encouraged to tap into all the literacy resources available.

At one point, to maintain the flow of her story, Ayame used the English word “soap”: “y luego le dio el soap a la bebé” (and then he gave the soap to the baby). In a separate instance, when Ayame was unable to recall the word for washing machine, she turned to circumlocution (Rossiter, Derwing, Manimtim, & Thomson, 2010), which is particularly apt for DL students who have been trained to use all the linguistic resources at their disposal.
Ayame drew on various skills to create meaning, not only of discrete lexical items in two languages but also of strategies for advancing her own literacy development in a single linguistic system.

**Ayame narrating a Spanish text.** Ayame’s total error scores on the miscue analysis were instructional (90%) and frustration (85%) on *Nos Gusta Nadar* and *La Escalera de Mano de Lucas*, respectively. After self-correction, her reading level remained instructional for *Nos Gusta Nadar* (92%), yet for *La Escalera de Mano de Lucas* (95%), her reading level was recorded as independent. During her narration of the Spanish texts, Ayame was aware of her reading process and self-corrected often. Many of Ayame’s miscues dealt with word endings, which is typical of English-dominant students in DL programs (Montrul & Potowski, 2007). For example, she uttered “viejo” instead of the feminine form of the word “vieja.” In some cases, she omitted sounds, such as reading “bajaba” for “bajaban,” but immediately self-corrected. Self-correction requires metalinguistic awareness to access the missing phonemes in the first utterance, and translanguaging allows for reflection on miscues to seek and find the right pronunciation.

Throughout, Ayame displayed awareness of the graphic representation of the words she was attempting to read. As she read, she tried to read the text as if she knew all the words on sight, which may reflect her confidence in her Spanish. This was evident when she read “mento” for “meto” and “Tati” for Tita.” At times, however, she came across a word she was less confident reading, such as, “tambaleante,” and she attempted to segment the word into syllables. First, she read “ta.bb.leante,” then she said the entire word “tablemate.” For other words, segmenting into syllables aloud helped her recall the meaning of words (e.g., pe.lota for pe.lo.ta, si.gueme for si.gue.me).

**Gabrielle’s retelling of a wordless book.** Gabrielle, who spoke no Spanish at home, provided a moderate-length retelling (258 words). She had been exposed to AAVE, MAE, and academic English, and she used the English possessive form in her Spanish description throughout the story, such as “su mama’s cosas” (her mother’s things). Gabrielle also revealed that classroom routines were affecting both her understanding of how stories end and her
language use. For example, Gabrielle ended her wordless story with “Colorín, colorado, este cuento se ha acabado” (Colorín, colorado, this story has ended), a phrase her teacher used at the end of every read aloud, which indicated that the phrase had become part of her own linguistic repertoire. Gabrielle’s rich translanguaging incorporated English syntax with Spanish lexicon and highlighted her development of a new discourse.

Gabrielle narrating a Spanish text. Gabrielle read Nos Gusta Nadar at the frustration reading level (85%). However, because she monitored her reading, her after–self-correction score was recorded at the independent level (99%). When reading La Escalera de Mano de Lucas, Gabrielle’s reading scores demonstrated a similar pattern: Her total error score (76%) indicated the text was at her frustration reading level, whereas her after self-correction score placed her reading skills at the instructional level (92%). Thus, given her skill to self-correct, Gabrielle maintained a high accuracy rate during both readings. Although her home language was English, Gabrielle displayed excellent comprehension skills when reading the Spanish texts. She recognized her miscues (words that do not match the text) and self-corrected them. Her flexible stance toward reading, then, positioned her as a more efficient reader (Goodman, 2015).

Gabrielle verbalized her discovery of unfamiliar words as she read. While reading La Escalera de Mano de Lucas she remarked, “Oh! It’s demasiado,” an indication that she monitored her reading comprehension, while resorting to explicit translanguaging by using English for her commentary about her own recognition of a Spanish word. Gabrielle also relied on syllables to decode words (ba.ja.ban, Sa.mi), sometimes employing incomplete breaks (pequ.e.ño/peque.ño). Her utterances approximated the words enough for her to recognize them (porqueño, peq.q.ño, pequeño), suggesting her oral vocabulary was developing. In addition, Gabrielle’s actions revealed how translanguaging allowed for numerous ways to approach literacy development, and that she was learning to think about the decoding of Spanish differently than a child in an all-English context might (i.e., the phonics approach).

Alternatively, if a word was not in her oral vocabulary, her ability to decode or approximate the word did not help her access the meaning of that word. For example, when she came across the word “tambaleante” (wobbly) she uttered, “tambien.le.ante, tambienleante.” It is likely she was familiar with the meaning of the word también (also), which might explain why she broke the word at that point. So, although she could access known words, she was unable to use translanguaging to differentiate a known word from a similar unknown word.
Joslyn’s retelling of a wordless book. Joslyn, who spoke Spanish at home, provided the longest narration (542 words). She connected the text to what was possible in her world, reconceptualized it, and critiqued it. By interweaving her perspective through a dialogic retelling, Joslyn added a more critical dimension to the story when she said, “El bebé cree que ella es su mamá. Pero ella no es una persona, es un animal . . .” (The baby thinks that she is her mother. But she is not a person, she is an animal). And then later, “Pero ellos no . . . pero los perros . . . no . . . no se comen la . . . la comida de las personas.” (But they don’t . . . but the dogs . . . don’t . . . don’t eat the . . . the food of people.). Joslyn’s world knowledge conflicted with the storyline presented in the text, and she interrupted her narration to comment on this conflict, challenging the text images. From her perspective, dogs were animals and could not take on human characteristics.

In other segments of her retelling, Joslyn wavered between storytelling and commentary voices; her narration was difficult to follow without the connectivity of events that might have given the listener a sense of story: “Y el perro no piensa que el bebé le [lo] está arreglando para ir a una fiesta. Pero el bebé quiere ir a una fiesta [a] bailar.” (And the dog doesn’t think that the baby is getting him ready to go to a party. But the baby wants to go to a party to dance.).

As she engaged with the story during the narration, Joslyn flowed in and out of the text and a new text emerged to reveal her critical and evaluative stances. When Joslyn came across the image that showed the baby in the basement near a washing machine, she mulled over the scene and participated in self-talk. “¿Qué es esto? Hmm, creo que es una lavadora. El bebé quiere ir a la lavadora” (What is this? Hmm, I think it is a washing machine. The baby wants to go to the washing machine.).

Joslyn narrating a Spanish text. Joslyn’s oral Spanish skills were very strong; however, she struggled with both reading and comprehension in Spanish. Joslyn’s total error score (80%) was at the frustration level when she read Nos Gusta Nadar, and at the instructional level after self-correction (91%). When she read La Escalera de Mano de Lucas, her scores did not exceed the frustration level (total error, 53%; after self-correction, 67%). While reading the second text, Joslyn shared, “no puedo leer bien” (I can’t read well). Her retellings after each of her readings revealed that she had a cursory understanding of Nos Gusta Nadar and an even looser sense of story for La Escalera de Mano de Lucas. She struggled to use text to support her ideas, and it took multiple attempts for her to accurately decode a word, which kept her from maintaining a sense of story. In addition to stumbling over simple words (she first read “alta” as “at,” and then read it as “aido”), Joslyn had 15
of the 33 words in her miscues provided to her. Despite her rich imagination and sharp higher order processing skills with a picture book, she struggled with written words. Where traditional assessments would almost certainly catch the same limitations we discovered, these informal assessments were designed to capture DL students’ translanguaging skills, thereby revealing Joslyn’s storytelling aptitude.

Reina’s retelling of a wordless book. Reina provided a midrange length story (322 words). When Reina, who speaks Spanish at home, came across the image of a laundry chute, she could tell it led to a place under the home; however, the image did not align with her understanding of how someone would enter a basement: “Carlos vio al bebé que estaba abajo de un . . . ¿un sótano? Un sótano (silencio tres segundos) y . . . de un sótano, y lo vio . . . ” (Carlos saw the baby that was under a . . . a basement? A basement (three seconds of silence) and . . . of a basement, and saw him . . . ) The word “sótano” (basement) demonstrates a strong grasp of vocabulary; yet, because many contemporary homes do not have laundry chutes, Reina’s unfamiliarity kept her from narrating the story as drawn on the page. At that point, she questioned the text content, in much the same way Joslyn did when her own understanding of the world and the illustrations clashed.

Later in the story, Reina brought her life experiences to the text when she interpreted the image of chocolate milk as Choco Milk, a brand marketed to Spanish speakers. Another term not used at school, “checó” (checked) appeared in her narration: “Carlos . . . no checó a la ventana a ver si ya había llegado la mamá” (Carlos . . . did not check the window to see if the mother had already arrived.). Ms. Sanchez reported that she never used the term but that some native Spanish-speaking students used it and she had never corrected it. Reina used academic Spanish, vernacular Spanish, and her own understanding of the world to deeply understand and richly narrate a picture book. Most literacy programs and assessments would not be able to capture any of Reina’s linguistic richness because they are myopically limited to academic language, even when they consider language inputs other than English.

Reina narrating a Spanish text. Reina’s total score for her reading of Nos Gusta Nadar was rated at the instructional level (90%); however, her score after self-correction placed her at the independent level (95%). When Reina read La Escalera de Mano de Lucas, her scores did not exceed the frustration level (total error, 83%; after self-correction, 87%), although she was approaching instructional reading levels after self-correction. Reina repeated the same miscues while reading both texts. A few of these reoccurring miscues included
her reading “hijo” for “dijo” and sometimes reversing her letters, as in the case “el gustaban” for “le gustaban.” These miscues reflect someone who is in the early phases of learning to read.

Reina could decode *Nos Gusta Nadar*, but she found it more difficult to decode words in *La Escalera de Mano de Lucas*. When she did not have a word in her spoken vocabulary, approximating that word through decoding did not help her access its meaning—as she read, “tambaleante,” she uttered “tam.ba.la.ante.” Although Reina came to school with a rich Spanish vocabulary, her reading of *La Escalera de Mano de Lucas* revealed she struggled with reading, but only when she encountered a challenging word above grade level. She did know how to attempt to decode the word, demonstrating her explicit knowledge of her own literacy development together with strategies for developing it further.

**Tamara’s retelling of a wordless book.** During her retelling of the wordless picture book, Tamara provided a midrange length narration (350 words). Tamara, whose home exposed her to AAVE and preschool to academic English, demonstrated an emerging understanding of gender in Spanish. She contemplated the gender of the baby, “La bebé quiere [quiere] ser una niña—. ¿Ésa es un niño? ¿niña?” (The baby wants to be a—That one is a boy? A girl?). She paused in her utterance not at the pronoun matching the noun, which she rendered in the female form, but where the ending on the noun would be. A great deal is taking place here with regard to translanguaging—real-world, difficult-to-identify gender of babies, her understanding of the story and her navigating Spanish gender. These rich and nuanced data are difficult for traditional language-dominant assessments to measure.

**Tamara narrating a Spanish text.** Tamara had no exposure to Spanish at home, and she appeared to be the most uncertain about her Spanish literacy skills among the study participants.

Tamara’s total error reading score for *Nos Gusta Nadar* was at the frustration level (83%), and her score after self-correction was at the instructional level (91%). When the time came to read *La Escalera de Mano de Lucas*, Tamara refused to read the text beyond the first line, placing her at the frustration level. Although she monitored her reading well, Tamara exerted a great deal of mental effort with both readings. She used syllable breaks to decode the text and her initial attempts were sometimes incorrect, but she often self-corrected (e.g., piso vs. pisa).

Tamara also used gestures to make herself comprehensible during the reading. For example, while retelling *Nos Gusta Nadar*, she did not know the word for swimming pool, so she stretched her arms above her head.
and pretended to dive into a pool. The use of her body to convey meaning exemplified a form of translanguaging that contributed to her multilingual identities. By finding a means to communicate, although her nondominant language emerged, Tamara maintained her interest in using Spanish. Unfortunately, educators and assessors often interpret physical movements, such as those used by Tamara, through a deficit lens and consider them only as evidence of a lack of vocabulary.

As in all classrooms, there were students for whom reading was easier than for others. The performance of these six students revealed, however, that they knew a great deal about both languages. The depth of analysis afforded by qualitative case study showed students’ engagement with both languages (including the multiple varieties of each) to support the development of a complex linguistic system and a deeper understanding of literacy. A translanguaging lens illuminated how students mobilized all their resources when their lived experiences were valued.

**Synthesized Understandings**

By utilizing a translanguaging lens during our analysis, we captured the unique ways in which the six DL students brokered and leveraged their own metalinguistic tools when they engaged with Spanish literacy tasks. Observations included in our assessment tasks captured the breadth and depth of emergent bilinguals’ multidimensional language use. Our informal assessments show how students embraced their languages to create meaning and to understand what they read.

**Wordless book.** As with most bilinguals, these emergent bilinguals relied on their ability to code switch (Meisel, 1994) to either maintain the flow of story or to buy time to retrieve a vocabulary word. They also employed the strategy of self-talk to negotiate among their linguistic repertoires. The internal dialogue the students voiced as they read revealed a historical lapse between the time the story took place and their present time. Moreover, students often relied on placeholders as they recalled terms or processed the words and the storyline. In reading the wordless picture book, all six students drew on enough language skills to narrate the story. The students’ manner of narrating the story reflected their language skills and their knowledge of story development. Understanding how translanguaging works, and what goes on in the minds of emergent bilinguals when they translanguage as they read, are key for educators to support DL students as readers. The power of informal assessments lies in their ability to capture the many nuances of bilingualism and biliteracy.
Vygotsky (1978) noted that students’ rehearsals of language with others, in a particular context, are the precursor for the internal speech they will later construct for themselves. In keeping with this idea, we observed that students frequently sought clarification from a more knowledgeable other, but at times they used their own internal monitor as a narrating strategy, thereby establishing themselves as emerging experts who are developing metalinguistic knowledge of Spanish. Capturing assessment environments through a translanguaging lens gave us a nuanced understanding of bilingualism and biliteracy among the participants in this study: It revealed the many strategies young bilinguals implement to construct knowledge and to communicate, including drawing on their lived experiences (much like their monolingual peers) and using their expansive linguistic repertoire.

Students approached narrating a story on a continuum: strictly text driven; a primary focus on the images in the book; a fantasy text, whereby students’ sense of imagination merged with the images in the text; and use of storytelling, description, and commentary. A traditional assessment would only focus on struggles with the reading of texts. Although recognizing struggles with reading was a necessary preliminary step toward becoming proficient readers, assessments that consider the richness of emergent bilingual students’ broad use of language across codes also increase our understanding of their languaging styles and skills.

Research increasingly recognizes that bilingualism is dynamic and flexible (García & Wei, 2014), yet traditional assessments of language and literacy do not always reflect the fluid nature of language. The narration assessment provided us with insights into the bilingual mind at work. Students’ individual definition of narration created the linguistic parameters they attached to the task. The task of narrating a wordless picture book was a good measure of students’ understanding of story. In our assessment, the process that students employed defied categorization solely based on their pre-determined language dominance and/or categories of skill level as readers. The translanguaging strategies used by emergent bilingual readers revealed that all students were able to use translanguaging effectively to narrate, and by identifying each child’s specific strategies through informal assessment, teachers could then build on individual DL student’s demonstrated strengths to advance his or her literacy.

**Reading Spanish text.** A closer look at students’ reading processes provides useful insights for educators working with students across linguistic profiles in DL programs. The DL students’ reading levels were rather uniform for the first text—the difficulty of the text ranged from instructional to independent. Students’ oral reading performance on the second text, however, revealed a different pattern.
The text for two students represented the independent level (one Spanish dominant and one English dominant) and another at the instructional level (English dominant). The text for the other three students (one English dominant and two Spanish dominant) was at the frustration level. Self-correction patterns indicated that these students had an ongoing conversation with their internal monitor to approximate words, to decode text, and to make meaning. Maintaining a record of DL students’ translanguaging practices provided insights into both how and why they translanguaged during informal assessments.

A key tenet of translanguaging is that DL students’ expressions in both languages relate to their one linguistic system. The strategies that students used to approach literacy revealed their metalinguistic awareness, which supports the notion that information from both languages is always available to them (Kroll & Bialystok, 2013). García (2009) noted that classrooms in which students were allowed to use language flexibly and biliteracy development was the goal were at the heart of what it meant to participate in translanguaging. The data collected from this study exemplify how assessments that are multidimensional capture translanguaging practices in DL classrooms. Because these assessments created spaces for DL students to have recourse to their funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), they took a more flexible stance toward reading and positioned themselves as more efficient readers (Goodman, 2015).

**Discussion**

Our study highlighted how six DL students translanguaged as they engaged with texts. The study showed how informal assessments, evaluated through a translanguaging lens, fostered the nuanced performance of language, which acknowledged students’ linguistic acumen beyond the outcomes provided by dominant-language standardized testing commonly administered in schools. Scholars must continue to question how DL students draw from their linguistic repertoires to make meaning of text to understand the benefits of DL programs for emergent bilingual students, especially historically underserved students.

Considering the linguistic practices of African American and Latinx DL students through a translanguaging lens revealed that they exhibited rich understandings of language, literacy, and storytelling. By offering enriching DL programs where minoritized students were deemed capable learners, Potter Elementary educators worked to bridge the opportunity gap for African American and Latinx students, in part, by assessing their language and literacy progress in dynamic and responsive ways. Identifying how young students used language and how they wove their life experiences into their
linguistic repertoires is timely because, as a field, we are still trying to understand the skills emergent bilinguals bring to school tasks and the tools teachers need to support emergent bilinguals’ language and literacy development.

As policymakers and educators consider how to best educate the growing minoritized student populations in public schools, this article shines light on the promise that DL education can benefit both African American and Latinx students. This study analyzed skills and strategies and did not simply determine students’ scores, which is important, given Ascenzi-Moreno’s (2016) findings that when students are assessed, the nature of their languaging and translanguaging is often overlooked because monolingual perspectives are still at play.

This article seeks to problematize the monolingual accountability system in view of the fact that assessing young bilinguals’ language and literacy development without understanding differences provides incorrect results. The African American and Latinx DL students in this study revealed what is possible when language and literacy assessment is redefined as a multidimensional tool for exploring students’ own use of linguistic and experiential resources at their disposal. DL classrooms allow students to start reimagining themselves as learners in general and language learners in particular. Moreover, the transformation that takes place as students travel along what Fránquiz (2012) calls the bilingual highway is not limited to any specific linguistic or experiential background profile.

We need more research that closely examines DL students’ languaging practices and how teachers assess DL students’ use of language. Although studies have shown similarities and differences between monolinguals and young bilinguals in narrative assessments (Bedore & Goldstein, 2004; Berman & Slobin, 1994; Jacobson & Walden, 2013; Muñoz et al., 2003; Rojas & Iglesias, 2013; Uccelli & Páez, 2007), what is missing from the literature is a discussion that moves us away from comparing young bilinguals with monolinguals. A new dialogue, one that focuses on the minds and the developmental trajectories of emergent bilinguals, is needed to move us beyond comparing the rates of acquisition of individual languages. Informal assessments that capture students’ dynamic language practices are imperative if we are to affirm the linguistic norms students bring to the classroom as legitimate forms of communication (González et al., 2005). To better understand how DL students progress beyond end-of-year performance, it is important to have longitudinal data that will show the changes in students’ understanding over time. In addition, documenting students’ day-to-day navigation of the biliteracy highway, and how teachers might support them, requires further research. Finally, to have a fuller sense of
how emergent bilinguals’ linguistic repertoires affect their language and literacy learning, it is important to extend these investigations into the home.

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