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Translanguaging in social media

Output for FLT didactics

Abstract. In the age of the internet, where over 2.6 billion people worldwide use social media to communicate, it is not uncommon to find instances of different languages being used within the same post on social media channels. This paper discusses the terminology used to describe this multilingual practice with particular emphasis on translanguaging theory. Its focal point is to explore why people engage in this type of multilingual discursive practice in social media, to investigate the attitudes towards digital translanguaging by the online community, and what impact translanguaging can have on foreign language teaching didactics, particularly bilingual education. A survey was carried out with 360 participants with a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds, and the results show that speakers engage in translanguaging in social media because they find it easier to express themselves and not for reasons such as to impress others. The paper also scrutinizes the didactic implications of translanguaging, and how it can be enhanced by social media insight. Understanding the motivation behind digital translanguaging may have a profound effect on how we come to understand hybrid multilingual discourse and its potential implementation in the classroom.

Keywords. Translanguaging, social media, bilingual education, digital discursive practices, didactic methods

Translanguaging in sozialen Medien

Schlussfolgerungen für die Fremdsprachendidaktik

Zusammenfassung. Im Zeitalter des Internets, in dem über 2,6 Millionen Menschen auf der ganzen Welt über soziale Medien kommunizieren, ist es nicht

ungewöhnlich, Beispiele zu finden, in denen verschiedene Sprachen in ein und demselben Post auf *social media* Kanälen eingesetzt werden. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Theorie des *translanguaging* betrachtet dieser Beitrag die Terminologie, mit der diese Art multilingualer Praktiken beschrieben wird. Dabei liegt der Fokus auf den Fragen, warum Menschen in den sozialen Medien solche multilingualen diskursiven Praktiken anwenden, welche Einstellung die Online-Gemeinschaft gegenüber *translanguaging* im digitalen Raum einnimmt sowie welche Auswirkungen *translanguaging* auf den bilingualen Unterricht haben kann.

Der Beitrag beschreibt eine Umfrage mit 30 Teilnehmer*innen unterschiedlichen sozio-kulturellen Hintergrunds, deren Ergebnisse darauf hindeuten, dass Sprecher*innen in den sozialen Medien *translanguaging* hauptsächlich deswegen einsetzen, weil sie sich auf diese Weise leichter ausdrücken können, und beispielsweise weniger, um anderen zu imponieren. Darüber hinaus untersucht der Beitrag didaktische Ansätze zu *translanguaging* und wie Daten aus den sozialen Medien diese bereichern können. Ein besseres Verständnis der Motivation hinter *translanguaging* im digitalen Raum könnte tiefgreifende Auswirkungen darauf haben, wie wir hybrides multilinguales Sprachverhalten und dessen potentielle Einbindung in den Unterricht verstehen.

Schlüsselwörter. *Translanguaging*, soziale Medien, zweisprachiger Unterricht, digitale diskursive Praktiken, didaktische Methoden

1 Introduction

Picture a classroom full of students where the class is about to begin. Two students are deeply immersed in conversation using language X, until another person shows them a video posted on Facebook in language Y, and they leave comments in languages X and Y. A student sits in the corner listening to music in language Z but is writing a post on their Twitter page in languages X and Y. The teacher comes in, greets the students in language X and asks them to settle down, but once the class begins, she uses language Y. She asks the students to read the text written in language Y and discuss it among themselves. Many students choose language X, others choose to discuss it in language Y, others still use features from both within the same conversation. They report back to the teacher in language Y, while one student says a word in language X because she cannot remember it in language Y. This is a situation that frequently occurred in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme at Druga Gimnazija Sarajevo while I was a student there from 2008-2010, and it is merely one example

of multilingual practices occurring in an educational context. Translanguaging is not merely a social norm among students in international schools, however, it also frequently occurs in other social settings such as monolingual German classes in urban areas or in other contexts as, e.g., migrant communities (Gogolin 2008).

I use the term *translanguaging* to describe the aforementioned flexible use of language within the same conversation or over the course of a single class. The theoretical framework used in this paper is established by using work from well-known contemporary advocates of translanguaging theory (see e.g. García 2009; García, Wei 2014; Wei 2018; Canagarajah 2011, 2013; Creese, Blackledge, Hu 2018). The purpose is to scrutinize why people choose to use this multilingual practice in their social media posts and whether that can have an impact on how students and teachers choose to communicate with one another in the classroom. In this study, I concentrate on the motivation behind translanguaging in social media posts, on the attitudes towards multilingual practices and cultural identity, and examine the impact that this can have on how languages are taught in schools.

Due to a long history of monolingual bias, mixing languages often carries a social stigma (see Crystal 1986; Pinker 1994; MacSwan 2000; Auer 2010; Heller 2007). According to MacSwan (2017, p. 172), linguistic stigma is “reinforced through traditional prescriptivism, the view that one language or language variety has an inherently higher value than others and that it ought to be imposed on an entire nation-state to maintain standards of communication”. Creese explains this persistence of linguistic stigma by noting that pedagogy is “an ideologically informed social practice” (2017, p. 6). Incorporating two or more languages within a single communicative event was often perceived as a deficiency, with the bilingual lacking enough proficiency in either language (cf. Gafaranga 2007). This prescriptivist ideology seeped into language teaching education policy, resulting in teachers keeping the languages separate in the classroom due to a fear of “cross-contamination” (Jacobson, Faltis 1990, p. 4). Switching between languages was perceived as a sign that a bilingual student was not proficient enough in either language (cf. Gafaranga 2007). This led to speakers periodically being derogatorily labelled “semi-lingual” (Baker 2001, p. 9).

In the last decades of the 20th century, researchers such as Cummins (1981, 2000), Grosjean (1982), and Hornberger (2003) began challenging the view that use of multiple languages leads to deficiency, and started encouraging multilingual language use in the classroom. Along with globalization, this led to a profound paradigm shift in how translanguaging in education was viewed, and discussions began emerging as to whether teachers and pupils ought to engage in such prac-

tices (cf. Wei 2011; Hornberger, Link 2012; Lewis, Jones, Baker 2012; Canagarajah 2015; García, Seltzer 2016; García, Kley 2016). Nonetheless, most schools, particularly in the economically developed Global North, are still “providing schooling through the dominant language of the nation-state” (Paulsrud et al. 2017, p. 16).

However, there is emerging evidence that translanguaging is beneficial for language acquisition and ease of communication as it allows individuals to express themselves more freely in a classroom environment and as monolingual education does not give bilingual children the opportunity to develop cognitively, socially or linguistically to their full potential (cf. García 2009). Translanguaging changes the perspective from a monolingual norm and highlights the cultural knowledge of individual students (cf. Jonsson 2017). The ability to construct very complex translingual utterances while still maintaining a level of understanding with the interlocutor requires a rather high level of proficiency in both languages. Velasco and García (2014) conducted a study which showed that bilingual children tend to produce more creative written work when they are allowed to engage in translanguaging.

Due to globalization and widespread use of the Internet, where an estimated 2.96 billion people worldwide use social media to communicate (eMarketer 2018), digital translanguaging has become enormously present. The social media data that presents the basis of this study was collected by conducting an online questionnaire, which shall be discussed in more detail in section 4. This research project was initially part of a Master of Arts thesis investigating the link between multilingual practices in social media and cultural identity. The present paper focuses on the functions and motivations of translanguaging in social media posts within the context of FLT didactics.

2 Translanguaging as a theoretical framework

With half of the world’s population being bilingual (cf. Grosjean 2010), it is little wonder that many people tend to use a combination of two or more of the languages that they are proficient in for communicative purposes. I find that the most suitable way to describe this fluid, dynamic multilingual discursive practice is *translanguaging*. The origin of the term comes from the Welsh *trawsieithu* (Williams 1994) and referred to an educational case practice where students use an L1 for input and an L2 for output in the classroom. For example, the reading comprehension would be done in English, while a writing task would be done in Welsh. The term was later translated by Baker as “translanguaging” (2001,

p. 280). The definition of translanguaging in a classroom setting is that it is “a process by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include all the language practices of students in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones, communicate appropriate knowledge, and give voice to new socio-political realities by interrogating linguistic inequality” (García, Kano 2014, p. 261). This definition accurately describes the social situation and cross-linguistic practices mentioned at the beginning of this paper, which occur in many multilingual classrooms across the world. Ideally, this approach to multilingual discursive practices does not place one language above another on the socio-cultural ladder and encourages students who may speak a minority language at home to feel comfortable and included at school.

2.1 Multilingual practices and terminology

Despite the fact that multilingual practice has been extensively discussed in academic literature, there is a discrepancy when it comes to terminology. One theoretical stance is *code-switching*, which Gumperz (1982, p. 59) defines as the “juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems”. This definition precisely outlines one of the fundamental distinctions between translanguaging and code-switching. Code-switching, on the one hand, presupposes that a bilingual person has two separate linguistic systems and that they switch from one to the other. Translanguaging theory, on the other hand, assumes that bilinguals or multilinguals have one complex integrated system that encompasses competencies for all of the languages that are part of their repertoire (cf. Canagarajah 2011; Otheguy, García, Reid 2015). Unlike code-switching, the description of which is primarily limited to focusing on where the boundary between two socially named languages occurs, the study of translanguaging also considers the pragmatic competence, cultural and social norms, abstract concepts, styles and registers and a variety of semiotic and multimodal features.

Wei (2018) argues that when it comes to the analytical toolkit, translanguaging draws upon “different linguistic, cognitive and semiotic resources to make meaning” (p. 1). This means that, according to Wei, there is an epistemological difference between code-switching and translanguaging. García and Lin (2016) claim the epistemological difference lies in the fact that code-switching assumes there are two separate cognitive systems, whereas translanguaging theory proposes one integrated system with features from socially named languages.

The classification of code-switching by Gumperz (1982) includes switching from L1 to L2 for reported speech, clarification, emphasis, to express emotion, to address a specific person, separating fact from commentary and to portray different perspectives. According to Myers-Scotton (1979), the majority of people switch back and forth between different languages for one of the following reasons:

- 1) A lack of knowledge of one language or a lack of facility in it
- 2) The use of another language to exclude some persons from an interaction
- 3) Switching into another language in order to introduce a new subject
- 4) Speaking in a different language to impress others (p. 73).

Although Myers-Scotton uses the term “code-switching” in her work (1979), very similar principles apply to translanguaging. Translanguaging also encompasses reasons such as belonging to a certain (sub)culture, wanting to stand out or blend in, or because it feels more natural to the language user.

Other terms describing multilingual practices are *code-mixing*, which is frequently used interchangeably with code-switching (cf. Muysken 2000), and *code-meshing*, which refers to mixing vernacular and colloquial language with a standardized form particularly in an academic context (cf. Canagarajah 2006; Young 2004). *Crossing* is also used to describe practices of mixing different languages, although the term refers to an individual identifying with a certain culture or wanting to be part of a community, hence adopting the language of that community (cf. Rampton 1999). Although Canagarajah refers to crossing as “a performative practice of translanguaging” (2011, p. 3), I find crossing overlaps at points with translanguaging rather than being subsumed as a total sub-type of translanguaging.

The intersection is at the points where an individual chooses to engage in multilingual discursive practices for identity purposes or to express belonging with a certain culture. If the motivation for translanguaging is for reasons other than to express belonging, crossing might not be broad enough to describe the various multilingual practices that occur. Another term used to describe multilingual practice is *metrolinguism*, which was coined by Otsuji and Pennycook (2010). While metrolinguism also accounts for the dynamic and fluid hybridity of multilingual discursive practices, it is at the same time usually tied to urban spaces, whereas translanguaging can occur anywhere, including the classroom.

2.2 Translanguaging and bilingual education

Canagarajah (2011) discusses the implications of consciously using translanguaging in the classroom as a didactic method and claims that translanguaging may occur as a natural phenomenon, rather than as a result of pedagogical strategies. Moreover, he claims that translanguaging takes place even in classrooms where language mixing is prohibited (*ibid.*). He also states that if translanguaging is a natural phenomenon, it should not be taught in schools but rather schools should provide the platform for students to practice engaging in a multicultural environment. Candelier et al. (2012) introduce the term “pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures”, which refers to “didactic approaches that use teaching/learning activities involving several (i. e., more than one) varieties of languages or cultures” (p. 6). This approach embraces the diversity of students in a classroom and does not discriminate on the basis of language competence. Furthermore, translanguaging can “serve to engage students, provide learners with access to curricular content, increase inclusion and participation, deepen understanding, and keep pedagogical tasks moving forward” (Allard 2017, p. 117). However, translanguaging used strategically and explicitly as a teaching method is still, to a certain extent, new and underdeveloped. Creese and Blackledge emphasize “the need for further research to explore what ‘teachable’ pedagogic resources are available in flexible, concurrent approaches to learning and teaching languages bilingually” (2010, p. 113). As this paper aims to show, social media can be a helpful tool in providing information to teachers and academics as to how and why translanguaging actually occurs, and what can be learned from this discursive practice for teachers to incorporate into the curriculum.

The function of translanguaging as a pedagogical method was explored by Creese and Blackledge (2010) by conducting a study with Chinese and Gujarati schools in the UK. Creese and Blackledge suggest that “as participants engage in flexible bilingualism, the boundaries between languages become permeable” (*ibid.*, p. 112). The study showed that students and teachers collaborate to convey meaning by utilizing modes from both of their languages, which ultimately is the purpose of bilingual education. Furthermore, they argue that “flexible bilingualism” (*ibid.*) is used as an instructional strategy by teachers to express the diversity not just in the classroom but in the broader community including parents, friends, and neighbours in order for the students to embrace the overlapping of the social, cultural and linguistic aspects of their lives.

The multilingual scenario described at the beginning of this paper is becoming increasingly common in international schools, as well as FLT classrooms. Raising awareness in teachers and students can potentially bridge the gap between

cultures, and advance social justice, since translanguaging revokes language hierarchies (cf. García, Leiva 2014) and rejects notions of pure and untainted monolingualism. By enabling bilingual students to use minority languages in the classroom in addition to the majority language, they become more fully accepted by their teachers, peers and the entire school community. Gómez Fernández (2019), for instance, discusses how translanguaging can be beneficial for achieving equity on group work. As translanguaging is presently not considered a standardized way of communicating with specific grammatical rules, it also changes the dynamic in overt prestige, with the standardized forms usually being more socially accepted and valued, and the non-standard forms having covert prestige (cf. Labov 2006).

3 Social media as a platform for digital translanguaging

To fully understand and appreciate the assorted multimodal and interlingual discursive practices occurring online, it is necessary to first explore social media as a tool for linguistic research. Defining social media as a concept can be immensely difficult given the breadth and varied usage of the term. A representative and therefore useful definition understands social media as

an umbrella term generally applied to web-based services that facilitate some form of social interaction or ‘networking’. This includes websites where the design-principle behind the service is explicitly about allowing users to create and develop online relationships with ‘friends’ or ‘followers’. The term also encompasses platforms where the focus is on generating and sharing content, but in a mode that allows comment and, potentially, collaboration (Zappavigna 2012, p. 2).

Social media used to be mainly investigated using digital discourse analysis, which gained prominence with Herring’s (1996) work on computer-mediated communication, which shifted the focus “from medium-related to user-related patterns of language use” (p. 421), and computer-mediated discourse analysis (Herring 2001), which discussed the various aspects of new media language such as structure, meaning, interaction, social function, and technological variables. However, there are now more heterogenous approaches to analyzing social data such as geospatial analysis (cf. Buchel, Rasmussen Pennington 2017), algorithmic processing of data sets (cf. Latzko-Toth et al. 2017), researching visual data (cf. Hand 2017), and predictive modelling (cf. Buus Lassen et al. 2017), to mention a few. Androutsopoulos (2013a) offered an ethnographic approach to digital discourse research with particular focus on alternating between languages, using

examples from text message threads among South African youth, group chats between second-generation Indians, e-mails among Egyptian professionals, forum discussions among Persian expatriates, and fan fiction written by Finnish bloggers. This illustrates the multitude of ways in which digital discourse may be analysed, and the diversity of the data. Androutsopoulos (2013b) proposed the cover term “networked multilingualism” (p. 1) to describe all the multilingual practices that arise from being digitally connected to other people, and the process of being “embedded in the global mediascape of the web” (ibid.).

Social networking sites such as Facebook, as well as microblogging sites such as Twitter, are platforms for people to express themselves and announce their musings to their online communities. The fact that there is usually space for others to comment on posts by the original user makes it an interactive experience, and it is when people choose to engage in digital discursive practices that translanguaging patterns begin to emerge. boyd and Ellison (2008) define the features of social networking sites (SNS) as: creating a profile, having an (optional) list of affiliated users, customising privacy settings, and viewing the activities of other social networking service users. Users of Facebook, the most popular social media site worldwide as of 2019 (Statista 2019), can adjust their privacy settings to include only their close friends and family, all of their contacts, or open public access to anybody within the Facebook community. On Facebook, as well as other SNS, messages can either be “directed to a specific individual, subset of individuals, or distributed to one’s entire network” (Ellison et al. 2014, p. 857). As an active Facebook user myself, I have observed that most people tend to set their privacy settings to “Friends”, where any person who they have accepted or added as part of their online social circle can view their content. This is relevant because it means the majority of people posting content on social media sites are aware that they have a virtual audience and wish to communicate with that audience.

Williams (2009) has explored how online users engage in multilingual and multimodal computer-mediated discourse to communicate with each other from across the globe. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Bou-Franch (2019) point out that numerous studies in the field of language and social media address the issue of online identity construction (cf. Bolander, Locher 2015; Bou-Franch, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014a, 2014b, 2018; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010; Georgalou 2016) since social media provide users with space to explicitly state who they are (or who they want to be viewed as), where they belong, and what their core values are. Technology allows for multimodal and creative ways of sharing this information and interacting with other similar-minded people. Kim (2018) analyses three examples of Korean migrant youth in the United States using progressively

expanding translanguaging practices online, such as video messaging and writing social media posts, and provides insight into identity construction through multimodal digital translanguaging. The interactive experience that social media provide enables people to connect with one another online and construct their identity based on shared features. People find meaningful connections by speaking the same language, and if two languages they both are proficient in happen to overlap, these people have even more in common with one another.

As part of a study on multilingual identity and digital translanguaging, Schreiber (2015) conducted an interview with a Serbian student of English who uses multiple languages in social media in an attempt to position himself as part of the hip-hop community. The student frequently posts links of music videos on Facebook incorporating African-American Vernacular English. The indexing of slang expressions in English enables him to establish his global identity as part of the hip-hop subculture, but his incorporation of Serbian simultaneously projects his local identity. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly common, particularly among teenagers and young adults using social media, and was one of the catalysts for the present paper.

Digital use of translanguaging may also lead to more successful second language learning. Using a “translanguaging lens”, Melo-Pfeifer and Araújo e Sá (2018, p. 867) explored multilingual interaction between Romance languages in chat rooms as a means to foster multiple language acquisition. Constant exposure to translingual utterances on social media channels, mostly incorporating English into other languages, can encourage language learners to look up and use certain words or phrases from other languages. Perhaps a translingual sentence consisting of words in the learner’s L1 and a target L2 might not be as intimidating to a foreign language learner as a monolingual sentence entirely in their L2. Multilingual practices in the contemporary digital age of SNS is becoming increasingly common, due to use of “internet slang” where words or phrases from L1 may be incorporated into L2 (Liu et al. 2019). According to García, translanguaging is “not only a way to scaffold instruction, to make sense of learning and language; rather, translanguaging is part of the metadiscursive regime that students in the twenty-first century must perform” (2011, p. 147). Fluid, flexible and diverse language use has become so common in social media that, rather than try to eradicate it, language teaching should embrace this practice and change accordingly.

4 Method

Thurlow (2018, p. 135) identifies three broad organizing principles in digital discourse research that define the core work of social media language scholarship: discourse, multimodality and ideology. Digital discourse refers to the “historical-political context of contemporary language use” (ibid., p. 137) and how language may be used for power purposes. Multimodality is regarded as the study of multiple semiotic modes and meaningful interaction with other semiotic systems, as well as the convergence of old media versus new media. Ideology – whether online or offline – focuses on the language norms that are adopted by a community and which standardizations are held in high regard in relation to socio-cultural hierarchy. This is in line with translanguaging theory and the social stigma that surrounds multilingual discursive practices. Translanguaging practices on social media platforms challenge certain ideologies in regards to linguistic standardization, as it is a reflection of the contemporary historical context in which technology has become a part of everyday communication and a multi-modal way of meaning-making.

Collecting data from computer-mediated discourse (CMD) to study translanguaging has certain benefits and drawbacks. There is great variety in both medium and linguistic codes, thus making analysis time-consuming. Dorleijn and Nortier (2009) identified nine characteristics of three types of CMD data (e-mails, chats and forums; see figure 1):

Characteristics	Social media
Easily obtainable	+/-
Background of authors is known	+
Easy to store	-
Longitudinal data	+
Manipulable (prone to being manipulated)	+
Diversity in text type	+
Informal/colloquial	+
Interactional	+
Embedding in real-life relationships	+/-

Figure 1: Advantages of social media for translanguaging research; adapted from Dorleijn and Nortier (2009, p. 133).

Some of these advantages that apply specifically to the use of social media data for code-switching are:

- The data provides socio-demographic information such as age, gender, hometown, education, and work placement of the users.
- The data can be viewed by date posted, which allows the researcher to observe language patterns over time.
- The data can be manipulated by the introduction of new topics, languages, etc.
- There is immense diversity in the types of texts ranging from informative to phatic.
- The style of language is usually informal.
- It is interactional since other users can comment or share their opinions.

Nevertheless, there are disadvantages to using social media data. It is not easy to store as it comes in many different formats. The following factors can be either a benefit or drawback, depending on the type of social media used:

- For the most part, it is easy to obtain the data, although sometimes there are privacy boundaries, e.g., while public posts are available for everyone, private profiles require permission to access the data.
- The authors may or may not know one another in real life. Therefore, their conversation may be embedded in a larger context, but if they do not know each other personally, this may not be the case (cf. Herring 1996; Seargeant, Tagg 2014).

Although privacy settings for social media sites can be adjusted so that a limited number of people can see the user post, it is still public at some level, in contrast to a private messaging system with one or more participants. Unlike a private message or group chat, all the user's followers and friends can see the content posted. Although these social media sites do offer the user the opportunity to message one person or a select group of people, private instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp do not offer the ability to write a post and distribute it to their entire virtual audience simultaneously, and it is usually a more private means of communication. Figure 2 shows the social media rankings according to the number of active users in 2019 (Statista 2019).

According to these numbers, Facebook holds the position of leading SNS in terms of user numbers. My focus is only on the most popular text-based social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram captions (Statista 2019) that are used to send out messages either publicly or to a very large group of

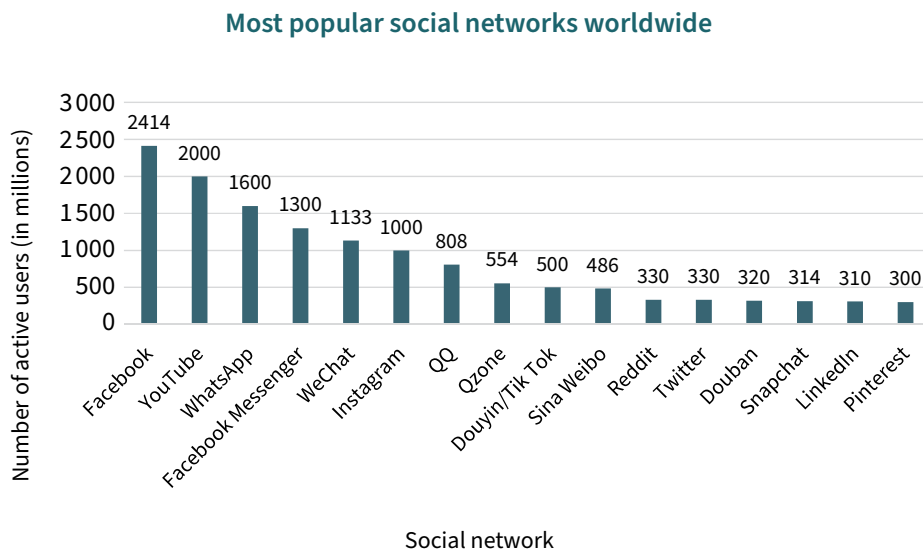


Figure 2: Ranking of social networking sites as of October 2019 (Statista 2019).

people, as opposed to private instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp and WeChat, free online telephone call apps such as Viber, or private video chat apps such as Skype. YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, Pinterest, and other sites where videos and images are the main type of content being posted are excluded, as well as blog-style networks such as Tumblr and SNS for professional purposes such as LinkedIn. Non-English social-media sites such as QQ and Qzone have been excluded from the study.

Two main methodologies were used in this study. The first was a questionnaire to obtain socio-demographic information about the participants, their language biography and competence, their linguistic practices in various social situations, their social media use habits, and their attitudes towards multilingual practices, identity and belonging. The second was to ask participants to provide examples of multilingual practices from their own social media posts, which were subsequently analysed. In this short overview of my methodology, I shall first discuss using questionnaires as a method for this type of interdisciplinary research. According to Dornyei (2007), questionnaires usually provide quantitative data, although open-ended questions may be included for qualitative analysis. The questions may be binary, multiple choice, or Likert scales, and the present study utilized all three, as well as open-ended responses. The main methodological concerns in using questionnaires to obtain data are sample size, and survey design based on participants' self-reporting.

The sampling size in quantitative linguistic research depends on the paradigm in question and the chosen method. The aim of the study was to find a diverse multilingual group of social media users with a questionnaire; hence, the sample size was set at 350 participants in order to consider the variety of linguistic biographies, socio-demographic factors, social media use, and linguistic competencies. The total number of responses exceeded the predetermined sample size, and the additional 10 responses were included in the final analysis. As previously mentioned, the second method was to qualitatively analyse the translanguaging examples provided by the participants, which they took directly from their own social media accounts. This was achieved largely in response to an open-response question in which participants were instructed to provide examples of multilingual practices from their own social media accounts and to specify which languages were used.

4.1 Participants

A heterogeneous group of people with a wide range of socio-cultural backgrounds, ages, genders and linguistic biographies was needed in order to be representative of the online community. Thus, a link for the online questionnaire was distributed via a number of social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter as well as e-mail. The criteria of analysis were as follows:

- All the participants had to speak more than one language and at least one of the languages had to be English.
- The participants had to be active social media users, i.e. maintain and regularly update their profile for at least one of the focal social media services.
- A wide range of genders, ages, language proficiencies and socio-cultural backgrounds were taken into consideration.
- In order to successfully submit the answers to the survey, completing all the questions was compulsory.
- For the open-ended questions, participants were given the opportunity to write as much or as little as they felt appropriate.

Regarding the demographics, almost half of the participants (49.4%) were between the ages of 18–25, whilst 30.4% were aged 26–35, 19.6% were over 35 and merely 0.6% were under 18. This means the vast majority of social media users who took part in the study were young adults around the age of tertiary level education, e.g., universities. This coincided with the general age distribution of top social networks (cf. Hoelzel 2015). Gender distribution was 70.3% female, 29.4% male, while 0.3% identified as non-binary. Participants listed 56

different countries of origin, and nationalities, with Bosnia and Herzegovina, United States of America, Germany, Croatia and Serbia being the most salient. This was because the channels of questionnaire distribution were my own social media platforms, where the majority of the social circle is from my home country Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as neighbouring countries. The countries listed were from every continent. The majority of the respondents (85.6%) were non-native English speakers, although they considered themselves to be proficient enough in English to participate in the questionnaire.

4.2 Research design

The questionnaire was designed using *SurveyMonkey* software, which allowed for both an in-depth approach, where only the responses of a single participant could be analysed, as well as a filtering system, where only the responses of people who claimed to mix languages on social media could be viewed. The responses were anonymous for data protection purposes, and the participants were informed that the data would be published as part of a research project. In total, 360 responses were collected, and the survey consisted of 30 questions. Given that the vast majority of participants did not have a linguistics background and were unlikely to be familiar with terminology such as “translanguaging” or “code-switching,” I chose to use the expression “mixing languages” to make the questionnaire more accessible to the target audience.

The questions were compiled according to several clusters:

- socio-demographic information and linguistic background (age, gender, country of birth, citizenship, L1 and other L2s, parents’/guardians’ L1s, language/s spoken in the family)
- linguistic biography (time spent in an English-speaking country, influence of social media/education/media)
- cultural identity (which culture the participant feels connected to; perception of bilingualism, whether they consider it important to remain fluent in their L1)
- language use in various social situations (social media, school, home, recreation)
- social media habits (frequency of use, preferred platforms, which language/s the participant uses in social media, what impacts their linguistic choices online)
- translanguaging and language attitudes (views on multilingual practices, whether they engage in multilingual practices)

This paper focuses primarily on the responses regarding multilingual practices in social media and why people choose to engage in this type of discursive practice. The analysis was both quantitative and qualitative. The former consisted of using percentages and Likert scales to measure whether sociolinguistic variables such as age, gender and cultural background influence translanguaging in social media and, if so, to what extent. The qualitative analysis was used to determine patterns in translanguaging, the purpose they were used for, and whether this coincided with the existing presumptions regarding digital translanguaging in social media.

5 Data

In response to the question “Do you mix two or more languages within the same sentence/post on your social media profiles?”, over half of the participants stated that they use some form of multilingual practice. When considering answers from the age group 18–35, 288 people, i.e. 55%, of the participants claimed they engage in this type of language use. When the filter for the age group over 35 was selected, 46% responded that they mix languages, whereas 54% claimed they do not. This indicates that translanguaging was distributed rather evenly among different age groups and that translanguaging did not necessarily occur more

Most popular social networks based on survey responses

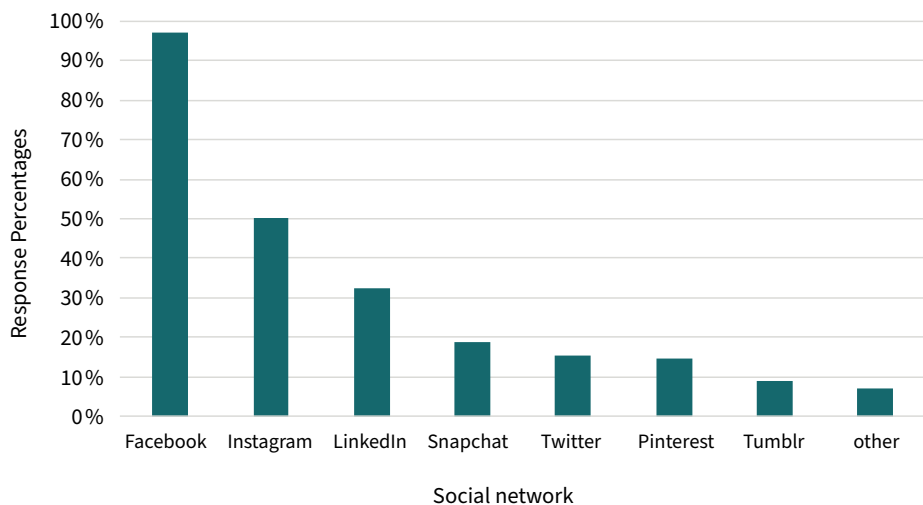


Figure 3: Ranking of social networking sites by the participants.

frequently among young adults. Similarly, gender did not play a significant role in digital translanguaging, and was consequently not analysed in more depth as a separate variable. One of the questions was to state which social media networks they use most frequently, and the results are shown in Figure 3.

These results coincide with Facebook being the SNS with the largest numbers of users, although on a global scale Twitter ranks higher than LinkedIn and Snapchat. Overall, the results of the questionnaire show to what extent translanguaging has become present in contemporary speech, particularly in computer-mediated discourse. If they ticked “yes”, the participants were asked to provide examples of previous posts or describe how they would usually post something whilst using various languages.

The following example was provided by a participant who has directly cited one of their own social media posts:

“Hola Erin, mi amor. How’s life going? Envoie-moi ton adresse y te mandaré una tarjeta postal. J’espère que tu vas bien ! besitos <3”

The first utterance is a declarative sentence entirely in Spanish (“Hola Erin, mi amor”). The person then shifts to English (“How’s life going?”); this is already a form of translanguaging occurring between two separate utterances, albeit not within the same clause. However, the person then moves on to use French (“Envoie-moi ton adresse”) and Spanish (“y te mandaré una tarjeta postal”) within the same utterance, by using two languages between coordinated clauses. This is followed by an exclamatory sentence in French (“J’espère que tu vas bien!”) which is a separate utterance from the previous use of Spanish and French. The person then once again uses Spanish to say a farewell (“besitos”) and uses a heart emoticon to express love. There is a blending of languages such as English, French and Spanish but also a combination of text and emoticon with the use of “<3”, which, when typed on social media sites, is automatically converted to a heart emoji. This multimodal, multilingual discursive practice is very consistent with the definition of translanguaging, as well as with Thurlow’s (2018) framework of discourse and multimodality in regards to digital discourse research.

Given that both the author of this social media post and their interlocutor understand all three languages, the author could have chosen to write the entire post in any of the three languages. However, it is a public post, hence the author is showcasing their multiculturalism and the fact that they are a polyglot not only to the intended message recipient but also to their entire social media audience. Interestingly, after reviewing their responses to the questionnaire, this person

strongly disagreed that language mixing is a mark of prestige, a sign of a global mindset, or used to display multiculturalism. They claim their reasons for translanguaging are due to their large number of foreign friends on social media and the ability to express themselves more freely in communication.

The explanations behind such examples in the questionnaire point to the fact that there is not a rigid monolingual standard in digital discourse as also supported by findings from Androutsopoulos (2013b) on multilingual language use on Facebook, and Wentker's work on code-switching and identity construction among bilingual students in WhatsApp groups (2018). This research and my own observations show that when people are free to express themselves through their social media posts, they do tend to engage in translanguaging. Shifting the focus from prescribed linguistic norms that are used in an educational context to developing fluidity in language is how social media may be used for didactic purposes. Based on the data, it appears that there is less social stigma and ideological language scrutiny online as opposed to a classroom setting. There is a close correlation between one's identity construction (i.e. how they wish to be perceived by others based on traits they themselves focus on) and stigma (i.e. how they are classified by others based on common traits they may share with other people that they do not necessarily feel connected to). When it comes to multilingual language use, social media give people this opportunity to address not only one group of monolingual speakers but also simultaneously many other groups of people who use language in the same way that they do.

6 Discussion of results

The respondents for the most part had positive attitudes towards multilingual practices, with only 25% rounded down from 25.14% agreeing that it is an indication of poor language skills and 18% rounded up from 17.6% remaining neutral. However, when it comes to overt prestige and translanguaging, merely 10% rounded down from 10.34% explicitly stated they consider multilingual practice to be a mark of prestige and admiration; the majority did not consider multilingual practice to be a mark of overt prestige or were impartial. This indicates that translanguaging might still carry a connotation of an inferior linguistic practice.

The final five statements in this questionnaire were intended purely for the purpose of exploring motivations for translingual discursive practices, and to determine if they coincide with Myers-Scotton's (1979) framework of reasons for code-switching and translanguaging. This was followed by a series of statements in which the participants had to mark to what extent they agreed (see figure 4).

As can be seen from figure 4, approximately 56% rounded up from 55.58% of the respondents claimed they mix languages because they cannot remember a

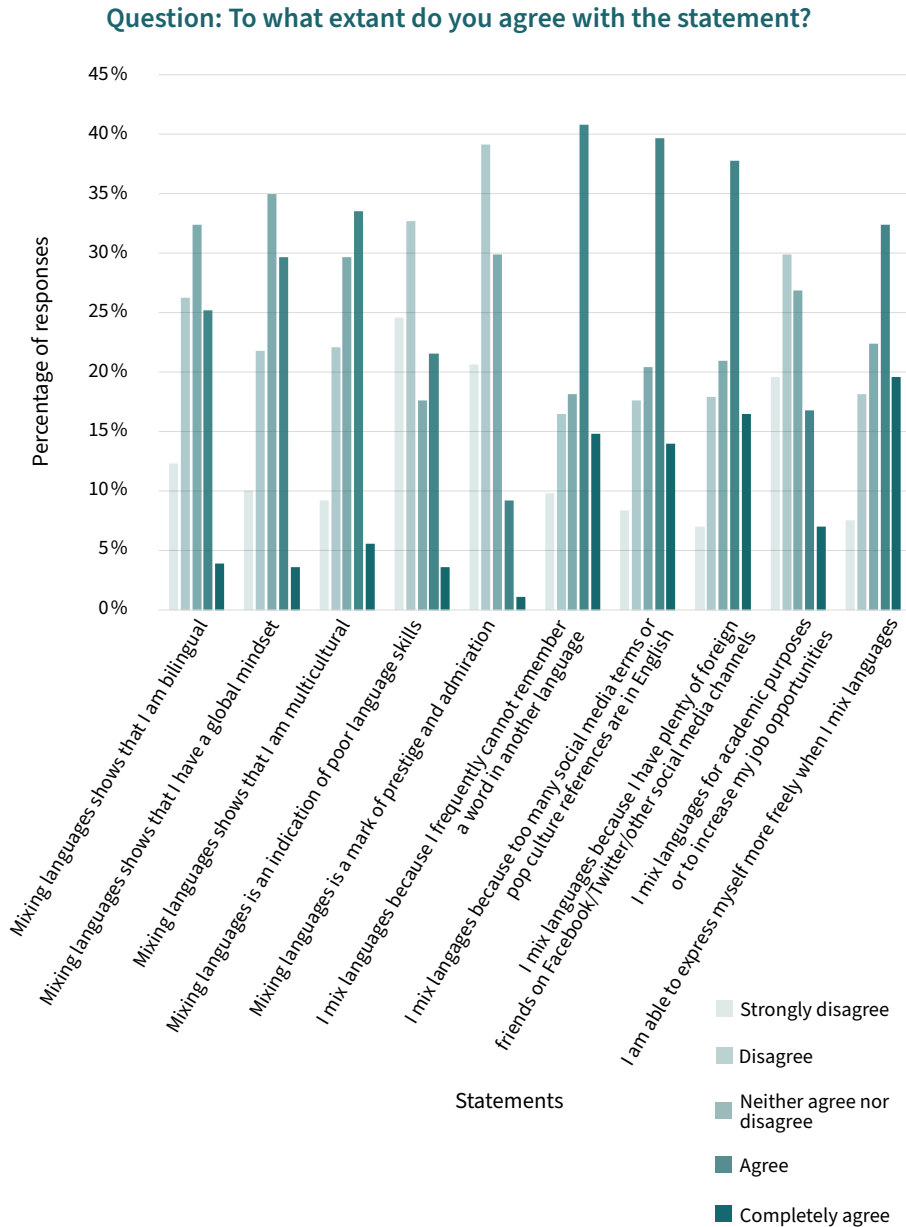


Figure 4: Responses to Question 27 asking participants to state to what extent they agree with the provided statements.

word in another language. Although this concurs with point 1 in Myers-Scotton's list (lack of knowledge of one language or a lack of facility in it), it may be the case that a bilingual speaker temporarily cannot recall a word or phrase in one of their languages rather than lack proficiency in that language. By removing the boundaries of strict monolingual language use, people are able to use whatever word comes to mind first. Translanguaging may also depend on the context of the situation, where a culture-specific item is used instead of its translation that would require circumlocution. This coincides with Myers-Scotton's observation that speakers engage in multilingual practices for the purpose of introducing a new subject or terminology. It may simply be the case that introducing a new term fits better with what the person is attempting to convey.

The subsequent statement asks if translanguaging is related to the large number of social media terms or pop cultural references in English and 54% rounded up from 53.63% of participants agreed or completely agreed with the statement. A lot of terminology used in social media tends to be in English, and rather than find transliterations of these notions in other languages, many people choose to simply keep the English form, sometimes with inflectional endings in other languages. This shows their belonging to the online community who uses these social media terms, and with English being the lingua franca of the internet, most social media terms and pop cultural references are predominantly in English. Numerous social media users choose to post in their languages as well as English to make their content relevant for a wider audience.

The next statement asks if respondents choose to mix languages due to a large number of multilingual friends on social media, and, again, 54% rounded down from 54.19% of respondents stated they agree or completely agree with the statement. Myers-Scotton (1979) claims that language mixing can occur to exclude some persons from interaction. This interpersonal communication differs from online interaction where excluding people might be achieved by adjusting privacy settings. In the case of multilingual practices, the intention actually appears to have the opposite effect and is used to include more people perhaps by using terms in English or writing in other languages to include people who may speak that language.

49% rounded down from 49.44% of the respondents claimed they do not mix languages to increase their job opportunities or for academic purposes. Although the majority of the participants may not use translanguaging for the purpose of impressing others (Myers-Scotton's fourth reason), among the 24% rounded up from 23.74% of participants that stated they mix languages for academic purposes or potential job opportunities and the 27% rounded up from 26.82% that

remained neutral, it is very likely that most of them, statistically speaking, mix languages to be perceived how they wish to be seen by their internet audience. It should also not be ruled out that some participants might not be fully aware that they are in fact translanguaging for the purpose of impressing others. Lastly, the statement that mixing languages enables a person to express themselves more freely showed that many people do find translanguaging useful, since 52% rounded up from 51.95% of the respondents agreed with the statement, which also coincides with García's (2009) claims regarding the benefits of translanguaging.

7 Conclusion

The results presented in this paper are part of a larger study which was conducted to explore the link between cultural identity and translanguaging in social media. This paper focuses on how many social media users tend to produce translingual content on their pages, their reasons for doing so, and what this may mean with regard to translanguaging as a pedagogical method in school. In this context, it is also important to look at attitudes towards multilingual practices in general and whether it still carries a social stigma. Given that around one quarter of the respondents agreed with the statement that mixing languages is an indication of poor language skills, the results show that there are still preconceived notions that translanguaging occurs due to language incompetence. However, the perspective on translanguaging seems to be moving in a different direction. This is illustrated by the finding that over half of the respondents said they find it easier to express themselves when they are allowed to use multiple languages within the same sentence or social media post.

The method used certainly provided a wealth of useful data. However, it is also difficult to control who fills out questionnaires with this type of broad distribution and some responses had to be excluded prior to analysis. Nevertheless, the data obtained was able to provide a picture in answer to the research question: Why do users engage in multilingual practices in their social media posts, what can be learned from this way of communicating and can it potentially be implemented in educational curricula? If this study is replicated with a different heterogeneous group of social media users and similar patterns emerge, this would point toward a shift in perception regarding digital translanguaging. A questionnaire with both teachers and students could be carried out to determine how they engage in translanguaging in social media, and how this type of multilingual practice can be implemented in the classroom. Further investigation into how translanguaging in social media might be used to enhance second language

learning ought to be carried out. Translanguaging as a didactic method is already being investigated within the context of interactional classroom conversations to see how teachers using multiple languages may influence students to do the same (cf. Canagarajah 2011; Bezzina 2017); however, digital translanguaging, particularly in social media and as a foreign language teaching strategy, has yet to be explored in more depth. Issues such as standardized assessment need to be explored more thoroughly if translanguaging is to be an effective didactic tool.

With translanguaging becoming increasingly common in online communication among students, it challenges the prescriptive approach of teaching students 'the correct way to speak', because it is apparent they find it natural to engage in these linguistic practices in social media. Translanguaging occurs in everyday conversation and by allowing students to utilize this discursive practice in the classroom, teachers can help to create an atmosphere that makes them feel more at ease and comfortable with using a language in a way that is more representative of how they communicate outside the classroom. Melo-Pfeifer and Araújo e Sá (2018) argue that translanguaging is a skill, but this raises the question of whether it is acquired as by-product of the environment a person is raised in, or a competence that should be taught and developed in schools? In this regard, Canagarajah (2011) cogently argues that if translanguaging is a natural process that allows flexible use of the speaker's entire linguistic repertoire, it ought to be recognized and encouraged in schools but not necessarily taught as part of the syllabus. If translanguaging was to enter the syllabus and a prescriptive approach to translanguaging were adopted, with textbooks on 'grammatically correct' forms of translanguaging, this would take away much of what this linguistic practice is about: offering a flexible, dynamic, and concomitantly successful mode of communication. This method would be an immensely difficult endeavour, as bilingual speakers have so many different ways of using translanguaging utterances with so many different languages that such an approach may not be feasible for the teachers to implement. Social media can be a useful instrument in observing how and why translanguaging occurs, leading to more discussions whether it should be accepted as a new standard, or a contemporary way to enhance foreign language learning in the classroom.

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