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Deconstruction and Integration: The Postmodern Characteristics of Translanguaging Pedagogy

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Abstract:
Translanguaging, as a multilingual use strategy, allows individuals to flexibly employ a variety of linguistic resources across different social and educational contexts. This phenomenon aligns with postmodern concepts such as multiplicity, anti-narrativity, decentralization, identity politics, the relationship between language and power, and the relativity of history and culture. The purpose of this paper is to explore the theoretical connections between translanguaging and postmodernism and to analyze how the practice of translanguaging embodies the core ideas of postmodernism.

Keywords:
Postmodernism; Translanguaging Practice; Translanguaging Pedagogy

1.Introduction

Recent years have witnessed significant transformations in the field of education, driven by advancements in science and technology. Traditional teaching strategies, which focus on the unidirectional transmission of knowledge and skills, are no longer sufficient to cultivate innovative talents capable of adapting to the rapidly changing societal demands. Postmodern educational thought has offered profound reflections on this issue, advocating that education should accommodate the needs of social development with diversity and openness, emphasizing a move beyond traditional knowledge transfer models to focus more on individualized growth paths and the cultivation of critical thinking for students. In this context, the innovation of curriculum and teaching strategies is not only an inevitable choice for educational progress but also a key action in response to the demands of social development.

Translanguaging practice, as an emerging pedagogical approach, encourages knowledge communicators to mobilize and utilize all available linguistic resources to promote the comprehensive development of students. This teaching method views language not merely as a tool for communication but also as a crucial medium for cognitive development and social interaction. Through translanguaging practice, students can flexibly use various linguistic resources in a multilingual environment, which not only enhances their linguistic abilities but also improves their cross-cultural understanding and innovative thinking.

This study aims to delve into the postmodern characteristics of translanguaging practice theory, explore its

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application in educational practice, and investigate its potential impact on promoting educational equity and cognitive development of students. By systematically examining the intersection of translanguaging practice and postmodern educational perspectives, this study attempts to reveal how translanguaging practice serves as an educational tool that helps students transcend traditional linguistic and cultural boundaries to achieve a deeper level of understanding and communication. This will provide educators with a new perspective to re-evaluate and design teaching strategies, especially in multilingual and multicultural educational settings.

2.Literature review

The postmodernist movement, which emerged as the fourth major turn in Western philosophy during the 1950s-1960s[1], has profoundly critiqued the educational traditions established since the Industrial Revolution, particularly concerning the essence of education, the mission of teachers, and curriculum theory. Postmodernist thinkers have proposed educational advocacies that emphasize diversity, equality, and openness, contrasting sharply with the traditional teacher-centered pedagogical model, which often positions students as passive recipients of knowledge. This is in stark contrast to the educational advocacies proposed by postmodernist thinkers. The diversity advocated by postmodernist education is not only reflected in teaching methods but also emphasizes the diversification of teaching means, encouraging educators to utilize all available resources for the transmission and exchange of knowledge. This concept resonates with the core principles of translanguaging practice, which emphasizes breaking down linguistic barriers and viewing language as a rich symbolic resource (Wei et al., 2023)[2], thus promoting educational diversity and inclusiveness. Through this approach, educators can more effectively stimulate students' learning potential, promote cross-cultural understanding and communication, and provide a more comprehensive and in-depth learning experience for students. Translanguaging practice in the classroom, essentially also known as translanguaging pedagogy, refers to the application of all linguistic symbolic resources by teachers in the process of knowledge dissemination. Scholars such as Tai (2023)[3] have found that teachers create translingual spaces to support student learning by utilizing multimodal resources like blackboards, gestures, and tapping on blackboards when educational technology support is not available. Wang (2024)[4] discovered that translanguaging has a distinct postmodernist imprint from a writing perspective. Additionally, numerous studies have indicated that translanguaging practice has a strong postmodernist character[2][3][5][6][7] (Wei & Lee, 2023; Tai, 2023; Tai & Wei, 2023; Wei, 2024; Tai, 2024). However, from the current research, it is evident that few scholars have conducted an in-depth analysis of the postmodern characteristics of translanguaging practice theory. Therefore, this study aims to delve into the postmodern characteristics of translanguaging practice theory, explore its application in educational practice, and investigate its potential impact on promoting educational equity and cognitive development of students. By systematically examining the intersection of translanguaging practice and postmodern educational perspectives, this study attempts to reveal how translanguaging practice serves as an educational tool that helps students transcend traditional linguistic and cultural boundaries to achieve a deeper level of understanding and communication. This will provide educators with a new perspective to re-evaluate and design teaching strategies, especially in multilingual and multicultural educational settings.

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3.Research Method

This study employs literature review method, systematically reading through the literature on translanguaging practice to uncover the postmodern characteristics that it exhibits in the teaching process. Concurrently, we analyze how translanguaging practice demonstrates these postmodern characteristics during instruction.

4.Results

4.1.Multilingualism and Anti-Narrativity

The phenomenon of translanguaging is both a linguistic practice and a pedagogical strategy, closely aligned with the anti-narrative stance of postmodernism. Postmodernism criticizes the concept of a singular, universal truth or narrative, advocating for the multiplicity and relativity of truths. Translanguaging embodies this multiplicity by allowing individuals to freely switch between multiple languages, breaking away from traditional restrictions on the use of a single standardized language form. Research has shown that the linguistic system of bilinguals is not composed of two separate systems (Otheguy et al., 2019)[8], and translanguaging challenges the conventional language separatism—that each language should have a fixed and independent domain of use—transcending the traditional monolingual and monomodal limitations in language learning (Wei et al., 2018)[9].

In the field of education, García and colleagues (2014)[10] found through their study of English classes for Latino youth in the United States that teachers could flexibly utilize the full linguistic repertoire of students to create a translingual space, thereby breaking the limitations of monolingualism or static bilingualism. This pedagogical approach, in the form of “dynamic bilingualism”, provided marginalized Latino students with opportunities to express themselves. In exploring the online teaching process of English as a Second Language (ESL), Tai (2023)[11] noted that teachers embedded different knowledge bases to facilitate students’ English learning by utilizing a variety of linguistic resources, body language, and multimodal teaching media to create a translingual space, integrating diverse knowledge into online classroom instruction. This translanguaging pedagogical strategy enables students to cross the boundaries of languages, writing systems, and modalities, fostering the development of cross-cultural and multilingual competencies.

Translanguaging practice not only reflects the postmodern understanding of the multiplicity and relativity of truths but also provides an innovative teaching strategy in the field of education that helps to unleash students’ linguistic potential and promotes the cultivation of multilingual and cross-cultural abilities.

4.2.Decentralization

Mobility, a characteristic feature of translanguaging practice, is evident in both classroom language use strategies and the dynamic distribution of knowledge power between teachers and students. This feature aligns with the postmodern concept of decentralization, which critically opposes any form of centralized authority, including centralization in knowledge, power, and culture.

In terms of language use, translanguaging practice breaks through the limitations of monolingualism and monomodality in traditional language learning, encouraging learners to mobilize their multi-lingual, multi-

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modal, and multi-symbolic resources for meaning construction and knowledge transformation (Wei et al., 2018)[9]. This practice not only promotes linguistic mobility but also challenges fixed and singular patterns of language use. The mobility characteristic of translanguaging practice resonates with the postmodern idea of decentralization. By allowing individuals to use language flexibly according to their social and educational contexts, translanguaging practice decentralizes language use, breaking away from the fixed patterns prescribed by authoritative institutions such as schools and governments. This is particularly important in the context of Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE). Johnson and colleagues (2019)[12] explored the possibility of adopting a more flexible bilingual and biliterate instructional model in DLBE classrooms. They pointed out that strictly separating English and Spanish instruction could have negative effects on student development. In contrast, allowing students to freely choose to use either English or Spanish during reading and discussion sessions can promote a deeper understanding of the text content and stimulate their critical thinking and creativity, significantly improving learning outcomes. Similarly, the findings of Pun et al. (2021)[13] confirm the same conclusion.

At the same time, translanguaging practice also plays a key role in reshaping the teacher-student relationship. Postmodern educational perspectives advocate that teachers should shift from the traditional position of the central authority of knowledge to one that respects the learners' experiences more, transforming the classroom into an interactive space for student practice and exploration. Current research indicates that in translanguaging practice, teachers flexibly use linguistic resources and actively learn from students, breaking the traditional knowledge-power relationship between teachers and students (Tai et al., 2021)[14]. The egalitarian knowledge construction space created by translanguaging practice can significantly enhance students' motivation to learn, promote positive interaction between teachers and students, and facilitate knowledge co-construction.

4.3.Fluidity of Identity

Translanguaging practice is not only a linguistic strategy but also a means of expressing cultural identity and self-identification. From a postmodern perspective, an individual's identity is seen as multiple and fluid, interwoven by various sociocultural factors such as gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. The application of translanguaging reflects how individuals demonstrate and construct their multiple social and cultural identities through language use in social interactions. In Wei's (2011)[15] work, young people living in the UK showcased their identification with and pride in their multilingual identity by effortlessly switching between different languages. These youths rejected being simply categorized into a single ethnic group and instead saw themselves as "citizens of the world", a recognition that reflects their adaptation to and appreciation for cultural diversity in the context of globalization. Furthermore, in Wei et al. (2020)[16], it was also found that the younger generation in Hong Kong expressed their identification with their local identity through creative translanguaging practices. This act, based on translanguaging, is referred to as "transpositioning", providing a foundation for the fluidity of identity (Wei & Lee, 2023)[2]; it also exhibits characteristics of postmodernism.

4.4.Challenging Authority and Deconstructing Power

Postmodernism posits that language is not merely a tool for communication but also a means of power and

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control. Translanguaging challenges the traditional linguistic authority and the hegemony of standardized languages by emphasizing the individual's right to choose and use language. This practice reveals the relationship between language and power, indicating that the use and choice of language can reflect and challenge social power structures.

By empowering students to use their native languages as well as other languages, educators can break away from monolingual-centered teaching models and promote linguistic diversity and equality. This decentralized approach to language use not only enhances students' motivation and participation but also cultivates them to become more open and inclusive global citizens. In the study by Mendoza et al. (2023)[18], it is mentioned that the medium of instruction policy in Nepalese secondary education, influenced by nationalism and neoliberal ideologies, has led to the neglect of mother tongue use by students and teachers. This neglect of the mother tongue is essentially an act of cultural hegemony. In translanguaging practice, teachers should coordinate and balance between the constraints of school language policies and the dynamism of students' language practices; otherwise, it could limit or marginalize the linguistic practices (de facto language practice) of bilingual or multilingual students(García, 2017)[19]. In fact, teachers who can correctly apply translanguaging pedagogy, after breaking free from linguistic constraints, not only create a relaxed and vibrant classroom atmosphere (Pun & Tai, 2021)[13], which in turn increases students' enthusiasm for learning, but also establish an equal teacher-student relationship, promoting a positive development of teacher-student dynamics (Tai & Wei, 2021)[14].

5.Discussion

Translanguaging practice, by allowing students to freely switch between different languages, not only enhances linguistic abilities and deepens cross-cultural understanding but also provides a platform for students to exhibit and construct multiple sociocultural identities. This practice challenges traditional language separatism, transcends the limitations of monolingualism and monomodality, and introduces innovative pedagogical strategies to the field of education. Furthermore, translanguaging practice helps to break the authority of language and the hegemony of standardized languages, promoting linguistic diversity and equality by empowering students to use their native languages and other languages, which is crucial for fostering open and inclusive global citizens. However, the implementation of translanguaging practice also faces a series of challenges, such as conflicts between language policies and practices, the need for teacher training, adaptability of assessment systems, sociocultural sensitivity, and uneven distribution of resources. To overcome these challenges, educators and policymakers need to work together to promote the development of educational policies, strengthen professional teacher training, reform assessment systems, and encourage community participation and support.

In curriculum instruction, educators can take the following measures: (1) Curriculum design should fully consider the diversity and openness of postmodernism, encouraging students to utilize various linguistic resources for learning; (2) Teacher training should be enhanced to improve teachers' understanding and application ability of translanguaging practice and postmodernist concepts; (3) Policy support is key, and educational policies that support translanguaging practice need to be formulated and implemented. At the same time, the reform of the assessment system should not be overlooked, and assessment tools adapted to translanguag-

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ing practice should be developed; (4) Community participation is crucial for the success of translanguaging practice, and the understanding and support of parents and community members will provide a broader social foundation for translanguaging practice. Through these measures, postmodernist concepts can be better integrated into translanguaging teaching, thereby promoting the diversity, openness, and equity of education.

6.Conclusion

This study has explored the theoretical connections between translanguaging practice and postmodern educational perspectives, and analyzed its application in educational practice and its potential impact on promoting educational equity and cognitive development of students. The findings indicate that translanguaging practice, as a multilingual use strategy in teaching, is highly congruent with core postmodernist concepts such as multiplicity, anti-narrativity, decentralization, identity politics, the relationship between language and power, and the relativity of history and culture. The application of translanguaging practice in the field of education reflects the postmodern recognition of the multiplicity and relativity of truth, providing an innovative teaching strategy that helps to unleash students' linguistic potential and fosters the development of multilingual and cross-cultural competencies. At the same time, the fluidity characteristic of translanguaging practice resonates with the postmodern idea of decentralization, allowing individuals to use language flexibly according to their social and educational contexts, thereby decentralizing language use and breaking away from the fixed patterns prescribed by authoritative institutions. Additionally, translanguaging practice also plays a key role in reshaping teacher-student relationships, expressing cultural identity and self-identification, and challenging authority and deconstructing power.

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