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“The Sound Behind the Mask”: Translanguaging Performance Poetry for Learner Development

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As a language instructor, researcher, and poet in Japan, I have experienced challenges in practicing arts-based pedagogy. Constrained by fixed proficiency benchmarks and summative assessments, my arts-based pedagogy in ELT often becomes too focused on product over process. Consequently, I wanted to explore the ways in which arts-based pedagogy could support language learner development in a more flexible context, integrating translanguaging into this pedagogical approach to amplify learners' existing semiotic resources and their multimodal journeyings in language learning. Here, I share understandings developed through an exploratory process with “Mohan,” an international student participant in a translanguaging arts-based workshop series implemented in collaboration with a university self-access learning center, a follow-up focus group, and two one-to-one discussions. Our dialogue probed the creative process and Mohan's subsequent linguistic development, anchored by his artworks and his experience as a student facilitator at the center. Throughout, the metaphors and symbols from his artworks became touchstones to which we referred to understand the shifts in his language development. These materials served as a crystallization of Mohan's mindset at the moment of creation, becoming an anchoring framework through which to identify the benefits of translanguaging arts-based approaches as well as future directions for development.

日本で語学講師、研究者、詩人として活動する中で、アートベースの教授法の実践に関して多くの課題に直面している。英語教育(ELT)におけるアートベースの教授法は、定められた達成基準や総括的評価に制約されるため、プロセスよりも成果に焦点を当てすぎる傾向がある。そこで、アートベースの教授法がより柔軟なコンテキストでどのように言語学習者の発展を支援できるかを探りたいと考える。また、その際、言語学習において学習者の既存の記号資源とマルチモーダルな探求を促進するために、この教育アプローチにトランスランゲージングも取り入れる。本稿では、留学生Mohanとともに、1)大学のセルフ・アクセス・ラーニング・センターと協力して実施したトランスランゲージング・アートワークショップ、2)ワークショップ参加者とのフォーカス・グループ、3)2回実施した1対1のディスカッションの3つの探索的プロセスで得た理解を共有する。Mohanと著者との対話では、アート作品とセンターでの学生ファシリテーターとしての経験に基づいて、彼の創造的なプロセスとその後の言語的発達について探る。作品に現れる比喩や象徴は、彼の変化の性質を理解するための重要な手がかりとなる。これらの素材は、Mohanの創作の瞬間の考え方を結晶化したものであり、トランスランゲージング・アートベースのアプローチの利点、および今後に向けた改善点や発展の方向性を結びつけるためのフレームワークとなる。

Keywords

arts-based pedagogy, collaborative arts, creative language practices, English language teaching, multimodality
アートベースの教育、共同創作、創造的言語実践、英語教育、マルチモダリティ

Introduction

When I started working as an arts-based social justice facilitator in community non-profits, I thought of my work as activism, not education. In my hometown of Tkaronto and later in Hong Kong, I sought to understand my social location in dynamic, solidaristic process with others. I believed in justice and in our collective capacity to grow together through arts-based learning and action. Suffice to say, it was messy, painful, and joyous. After transitioning to English language education and classroom teaching in Japan and Thailand a decade ago, I have been puzzling on how to apply arts-based pedagogy in a way that evokes the solidarity, mess, and joy of my earlier work. This is grounded in a striving for non-hierarchical relationship and trust to channel what the participant in this study calls “the sound behind the mask” (Mohan, personal communication, June 30, 2023), or the feelings that lie past social niceties and attempts to conform to sociocultural expectations at the expense of our authentic feelings and selves. In response to institutional demands for summative assessments and standardized proficiency measures, my arts-based practices in school settings have often felt overly product-oriented and activity-based. This has led

me to ask: How can translanguaging arts-based pedagogy in English language classrooms support us to engage in holistic connection and critical reflection?

In this exploratory inquiry, I explore the ways in which translanguaging arts-based pedagogy can facilitate authentic connection and reflection for learner development. Translanguaging (García, 2009) has received great attention in language education in the past two decades and is defined as the “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds” (p. 45). This applied theory of language (Li, 2018) is informed by the way in which bilingual individuals, families, and communities cross state-defined linguistic boundaries in everyday interaction. This boundary-crossing is distinct from code switching as it allows bilinguals and multilinguals, terms used by García interchangeably, to express themselves through their holistic semiotic repertoires, which are inherently multimodal. In a growing number of studies, translanguaging is integrated with arts-based pedagogy (Hirsu et al., 2021) to amplify the affordances of both. Examples of translanguaging arts-based pedagogy in language education include studies on translanguaging performance poetry (Burton & Van Viegen, 2021), identity text poems (Dutton & Rushton, 2021), drama and role-play (Galante, 2022), creative movement, visual arts, and multi-arts approaches (Rajendram et al., 2022). Arts-based pedagogy is distinct from arts education as rather than instruct on medium-specific artistic skills, it integrates the arts into study on any topic to synthesize knowledge and “draw out the soul” (Oliver et al., 2019) across the disciplines. An arts-based approach involves affect-related (Rieger et al., 2016) and transformative (Dewhurst, 2011) benefits by facilitating self-awareness and connection (Greene, 2001).

Given these potential affordances, my goal in this study was to apply translanguaging arts-based pedagogy and observe its possibilities. I conducted the initial pedagogical process, a series of two 120-minute workshops, through the cooperation and in-kind support of a university self-access language learning center. I engaged in a dialogue with one of the seven participants, Mohan (a pseudonym), over the course of the next several months. This study focuses on these dialogues as we reflected on the initial creative process and his shifts since that time. I chose to focus on Mohan because of his role as a student facilitator at the self-access center. On the job, he engaged service users in conversation and supported them around their learning goals. Consequently, he had a unique perspective not only on how the pedagogical process impacted his own linguistic developmental journey, but also on how it might be implemented with visitors to the center, mainly Japanese undergraduate students.

In this article, I first discuss what brought me to this question, grounding the impetus of this study in my emic perspectives as a multilingual. Next, I explain my methodology and then proceed to share my understandings of the themes generated. In the discussion and conclusion, I propose some key understandings to inform future research directions in learner development through arts-based pedagogy.

Impetus for the Study

I was born and raised in Tkaronto, a Mohawk name for what is colonially referred to as Toronto, Canada. The city is on land traditionally stewarded by several Indigenous nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. As a child at home, I spoke only Mandarin and Cantonese. In my Chinese community in downtown Tkaronto, I spoke Cantonese. At school, it was English and French. At home, early on, we communicated in Mandarin, and my mother and grandmother interacted in Hokkien, or Fujianese. My father's side, who we saw infrequently,

spoke in Shanghainese, Mandarin, and English. I was also surrounded by the languages of Portuguese and Italian in my neighbourhood, Little Portugal.

But these languages did not grow to co-exist in harmonious, mutually reinforcing ways. Entering a bilingual public school, linguistic hierarchies symptomatic of Canada's white supremacist "vertical mosaic" (Porter, 1965) mandated a silencing of my racialized mother tongues. As children do, I perceived these hierarchies instinctively and did my utmost to assimilate by evacuating any trace of Mandarin or Cantonese "interference." I was determined that my accent would be "Perfectly Canadian." I read everything my white classmates did such as the work of Judy Blume, Beverly Cleary, Roald Dahl, C. S. Lewis. These works, while still cherished, shared a dominant whiteness whose harmful impact on Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color is well-documented (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). So, I painted pictures of myself with blond hair in kindergarten. By age 10, it had become a chestnut brown, but never its actual color: black.

My linguistic development in Mandarin and Cantonese withered as I threw all I had into the project of assimilation. The result of this "subtractive bilingualism" (Lambert, 1981) was one kind of survival at the expense of another. In striving for linguistic accuracy, I attempted to achieve an unassailable position, becoming "more French than the French" (Derrida, 1998, p. 49). Although I enjoyed writing as a child, fiction was difficult, likely because my model texts did not reflect my experience. I couldn't seem to write in a voice that didn't feel like it belonged to someone else. In poetry, though, I could hear myself. The poem did not have to be grammatical. It didn't have to take a certain structure. It didn't have to stick to a single language; many poems mix languages in novel ways. It just had to feel right in some elemental way, a way that only I might understand or benefit from. Each poem was a universe, true and valuable on its own terms. Its terms—my terms—were enough. I continued to write poetry and began performing it at various venues, finding strength and affirmation in expressing myself, and in the connections to creative diasporic communities in Tkaronto.

Now, as an educator in Japan, these early experiences paired with the ways I saw native speakerism unfold in my classrooms informed my desire to explore the potentials of translanguaging poetry in the Japanese EFL context. The way that poetry as a genre invites linguistic play is inherently affirming of learner autonomy in linguistic development; after all, who says one must master a certain type or level of proficiency before playing with the dimensions of language—that is, of any discrete language, or of language as a concept? From another perspective, we could say that playing with the "rules" of language is an important way to not only understand our relationship(s) to language(s), but also to delineate our own dynamic terms of engagement with it. Playing with language through poetry, learners are encouraged to expand the possibilities of how they relate to language(s): a paradigm shift that can foster self-determination more broadly.

Poetry and, later, popular theatre (Boal, 1993) led to my work as an arts-based social justice educator in NGO settings in Toronto and Hong Kong. After a decade of this work, precarious due to the political nature of NGO funding, I went back to school for teacher's college and moved to Japan. I began working as a secondary school teacher and English Language Learning program coordinator at an international school. With the change in national and institutional context, my orientation to social justice and arts-based education was shaken. Living in a cultural context that was not "my own" caused me to question my right to critique and challenge the social order, especially as someone with Western privilege. As an artist, my relationship to my practice was interwoven with my activism, but it was difficult to see how my classroom teacher, activist, and artist selves could coalesce in new and

unfamiliar contexts. I struggled to name and explicitly infuse my values into my classroom teaching in Japan.

Why did my notions of “classroom teacher” push my other selves to step aside? Besides everyday institutional challenges, my identity as a classroom and language teacher was still nascent. In pushing myself to inhabit the role of teacher as knower and authority, I often defaulted to what I felt was expected of me by my superiors. Still, at staff meetings, I spoke up about social justice issues; I advocated for students, especially English language learners, and made some positive changes to the program. But in many ways it seemed impossible to integrate the roles of activist and teacher. So, if I was good at my job, I was strengthening the institution: a sellout. If I wasn’t, I was giving “them” a reason to discount me.

Translanguaging

Teaching for another decade in Japan, with a stint in Thailand, I encountered the concept of translanguaging and was struck by its affirmation of multilingual realities through an asset-based approach. Learning about it inspired both grief and relief. I felt grief when I reflected on what a difference this paradigm would have made in my own formative schooling experiences. Although the literature confirms that inviting students to channel their existing linguistic knowledge (e.g., knowledge of Mandarin, Japanese, etc.) can help in learning a new language (Cummins, 1979), mainstream education has been slow to understand this.

I also felt relief at being seen as a multilingual and at finding a lens through which to perceive my proficiencies as a unified whole, rather than as wounded reminders of what might have been. Translanguaging offers an asset-based perspective on proficiency, focusing learners on becoming bilingual rather than “native-like.” As most of the global population is bilingual or multilingual (Canagarajah & Wurr, 2011), encouraging students to join this majority can foster pride in their whole language repertoire (García & Otheguy, 2020) rather than the kind of shame I experienced as a multilingual speaker of raciolinguistically (Flores & Rosa, 2015) marginalized languages. This “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992) paradigm shift challenges us to reflect on “named languages” such as English and Japanese as social and bureaucratic constructs, rather than “natural” ones.

Furthermore, translanguaging is now understood to encompass not only the linguistic, but the multimodal, making it an intuitive fit with arts-based approaches in their integration of “sensuous learning and embodied knowledge” (Meltzer, 2019, p. 139). Multimodality refers to the ways in which we use and perceive multiple semiotic modes—aural, gestural, linguistic, visual, spatial—simultaneously, asking us to understand interactions in terms of modes rather than languages (Kress, 2010). As Li explains, “A key objective of the translanguaging project is to build a new way of thinking and talking about language not as sets of abstractable codes but as multimodal semiotic systems for meaning- and sense-making” (2022, p. 409).

Methodology

I conducted two 120-minute workshops, as a series, in February 2023, in partnership with a university self-access language learning center. This partnership was inspired by the ongoing desire on the part of the center to offer a range of activities to its service users, and my desire to implement these activities in a setting freer from curricular constraints. The center provided in-kind, outreach, and staff support while I developed and implemented the workshop activities. The workshop process had four phases as outlined in Table 1:

1. Trust-building: Engaging in multimodal activities to facilitate connection among participants
2. Generating: Applying a language mapping process to help them brainstorm raw material for poetry
3. Crafting: Asking participants to draw on these materials to shape poems, with the support of optional writing prompts, and
4. Performance: Offering the opportunity for them to share their poems to an audience of center facilitators and invited friends.

I encouraged participants to draw on their entire linguistic repertoires throughout.

Table 1. *Description of the workshop phases*

Phase	Objectives	Sample activities	Duration in minutes (approx.)
1. Trustbuilding	To build a trusting and supportive environment conducive to risk taking To set a warm, curious, and playful tone to the process	After inviting participants to co-create community norms, I used simple multimodal activities to facilitate holistic connection between participants (i.e., not limited to the linguistic/verbal), e.g., - Simple movement-echoing games (Boal, 2002) - Silent lineup - Boats/Buses icebreaker	40
2. Generating	To support participants in accessing memories, experiences, feelings, and ideas connected to language and the body To support participants in putting their ideas on paper, in words, images, etc.	- Language mapping (see below) - Story of my name - Brainstorming lines connected to the language map (1 line per sticky note, affixed to the related area of the language map) with optional writing prompts, e.g., "My English is..." (Seltzer, 2020), "My Japanese is...", "My arms are...", "My stomach is..."	95
3. Crafting	To shape the raw material generated in the prior phase into a poem/piece	- Selecting sticky notes and/or ideas brainstormed onto their own language maps to create a patchwork of meaning	45
4. Performance (Optional)	To affirm and celebrate participants' creative processes and the group's co-creative process	- Participants had the option to share their poems to an audience of invited friends and center staff.	60

Language mapping (Table 1, "Generating") needs some elaboration as a novel integration of two existing methods: body mapping (Gastaldo et al., 2012) and language portraits (Krumm, 2007), also known as plurilingual portraits (Mohamed, 2020). I developed this integrated method to enhance creative reflection on language practices and affect in an

embodied way. Body mapping is an arts-based methodology that was first applied by Jane Solomon in the early 2000s in conducting needs assessment and healthcare advocacy with HIV-positive women in South Africa (Gastaldo et al., 2012). Since that time, it has been used in an array of contexts, but particularly in health and education. In body mapping, a life-sized outline of each participant's body is traced onto mural paper—they lie on the paper, in a pose of their choice, and another participant traces their outline onto the paper with a marker. Each person's body map then becomes a canvas upon which they express their feelings, ideas, and memories through a guided group process. The map serves as a tool for participants to connect to their experiences of and connections to their languaging through the body.

Integrating the language portraits method (Krumm, 2007) to the body map, participants were asked to color in the body according to their languages. In the original language portraits approach, participants are given an A4-sized sheet of paper with a human outline on it. They are then asked to assign each of their languages a color, and then to color in their bodies accordingly. English might be yellow, Hindi green, and so on. Language mapping encouraged the workshop participants to relate their embodied connections to their languages through their creative decisions and associations to color. Participants were then asked to expand on their ideas through visual or written means, using their body maps “as a canvas” in an open-ended way. In the crafting phase, I offered several optional writing prompts; the one most taken up was “My [English/Japanese/etc.] is...” (Seltzer, 2020), although most did not use these prompts in their final poems. I did not offer any model texts or performances to encourage a sense of openness, avoid limiting participants' creative interpretations, and lessen anxiety around the creation of a final product.

Data Collection

Responding to an announcement disseminated by the center, Mohan participated in the initial workshop series in February 2023. He was 29 years old and had completed his undergraduate degree in India. Mohan was now at the end of his first year in Japan as a master's student at a national university in urban Japan and was also in his first year of working as a student facilitator at his university's self-access language learning center. His role at the center, along with his reflections on his Japanese language learning journeys and his relationships to English and Hindi, led to my interest in engaging him in ongoing dialogue around the pedagogic activities as related to his language development journey. As shown in Table 2, from February to October 2023 I engaged in periodic in-person dialogues with Mohan, and he received a ¥2000 gift card as participant honorarium at the second workshop and at each subsequent meeting.

Table 2. *Pedagogic and dialogic activities*

Date	Research interactions with Mohan (in-person)	Duration in minutes	Total number of participants
2 February 2023	Workshop 1	120	7
9 February 2023	Workshop 2	120	7
27 February 2023	Focus group discussion	90	3
30 June 2023	One-to-one dialogue	90	1
31 October 2023	One-to-one dialogue & participant validation of a preliminary draft of this article	120	1

I gained approval for this study from the Kyushu University Faculty of Design's Ethics Committee and gathered informed consent from Mohan at each meeting. Informed by a participatory stance, we discussed the boundaries around what could be included in the study throughout. The data used are Mohan's language map, poem, video observation of his poetry performance, and audio recordings and transcripts of the focus group discussion and dialogues.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to generate themes that "are creative and interpretive *stories* about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594, italics in original). Given my participatory orientation, I engaged in member checking, also known as participant validation (Ravitch & Carl, 2021) by sharing the beginnings of my iterative theme development with Mohan prior to the final dialogue. He responded to these proposed themes when we met, confirming some of my interpretations and rejecting others. As such, I would add the participant's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and our dialogic dynamics (as shaped by hegemonic constructions of researcher/participant, older/younger person, doctoral/masters student) to the intersection that Braun and Clarke (2019) identify.

Mohan's Performance Poem

Below are the original poem Mohan created through the workshops and his own English translation of the work. In the translated version, translated lines are indicated with the use of square brackets. In the brackets, "H" indicates lines originally in Hindi, and "J," lines in Japanese.

Eyes filled with the feelings (Original)

ये आंखें ... ये आंखें जो कहती हैं ।
ज़रा सुनने की ज़हमत तो करो ...
These eyes speak what this heart feels...
マスクの前の音も
聞こえてね。。。 (それは大事だ)
ये शरीर दखिता बड़ा है...
पर ये दिल बच्चा है जी ...
ever seen a flower petal falling on the sea,
so gentle, so beautiful...
私も同じと思います
音なし。。。友達になると思います
if you feel that it's easy for you to talk
with me,
it is the confident Indian talking...
けど中の日本人は
めっちゃ恥ずかしいだよ。。。
だから。。。
取扱注意下さいね～

Translated version

[H: These eyes... these eyes say something.
Will it bother you to listen to them a little?]
These eyes speak what this heart feels...
[J: Can you please hear the sound
behind the mask as well? (It's important...)]
[H: This body, it seems big...
But this heart, it is still immature, sir...]
Ever seen a flower petal falling on the sea,
so gentle, so beautiful...
[J: I think I am similar to these flower petals
I will become friends without making any noise.]
If you feel that it's easy for
you to talk with me,
it is the confident Indian talking,
[J: But the Japanese inside
is very shy
That's why, can you be a little careful in
handling me?]

Themes

The themes we generated were: (a) multiple selves in multiple languages, (b) metaphor as a self-made benchmark on the developmental journey, (c) understanding proficiency through the proportions of the poem in each named language, and (d) translanguaging performance poetry supporting learner agency.

Multiple Selves in Multiple Languages: Masks and “The Sound Behind the Mask”

In dialogue, Mohan discussed how the creative process served to “bring out the self” or the “selves” he felt he held in each of his named languages:

I feel that your personality changes with every language. ... I have a different personality when I speak in English, or when I speak in ... Japanese. In [English and Japanese], I can control my feelings, which I cannot do if I speak my native language of Hindi. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

Mohan explained that he projected a very confident English self, “maybe because I learned it in school,” and we discussed how this was illustrated in his poem. The lines originally written in English are more declamatory, while the ones written in Japanese and Hindi have a greater sense of questioning and appealing for understanding. Mohan also expressed a sense of needing to restrict the behaviour of his Japanese self, or what he referred to as “this Japanese guy,” or the Japanese self that he embodied when interacting in Japanese. He related this to conformist social dynamics in Japan, dynamics he had learned about from living here and, importantly, through his conversations with Japanese students at the center. Mohan used the metaphor of “the mask” and “the sound behind the mask” to convey the self he constructs to present to the outside world, a “formal” self, in contrast to “the sound behind” it, an “informal” self. His poem contains the line, originally in Japanese: “Can you please hear/ the sound behind the mask as well? (It’s important ...).” The literal translation would be “The sound in front of the mask,” but his innovative use of 前, or *mae*, references the Japanese concept of *tatemae*, 建前, literally “construct” and “front.” *Tatemae* is the public-facing, socially obligated self, which stands in contrast to *honne*, one’s “true feelings or intentions” (Buzzi & Megele, 2011, p. 84), Mohan’s “sound behind the mask.” His mask, or his “Japanese, *tatemae* self” is a formal, “uncontroversial guy” that he conveys in the poem in both Hindi and Japanese, although he described only experiencing this self in Japanese. The line: “This body, it seems big.../but this heart, it is still immature, sir...” is originally written in Hindi, but he connected the use of “sir” to his Japanese self:

Whenever I use “sir,” it’s not giving respect to someone ... It’s the *tatemae* thing, which I get whenever I speak in Japanese, which does not exist in Hindi or in English ... So it’s like, if I’m talking to someone, I would like to pay them respect in such a way that it hides my feelings. So the usage of “sir” is more, like, you know, I’m literally obstructing you ... I’m putting a block in front of me so that you don’t get close. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

So, while the Japanese and Hindi voices in the poem seem to be appealing to the reader for understanding, they are simultaneously foreclosing more authentic expressions. This demonstrates how arts-based pedagogy can be a powerful facilitator of reflection, as well as how the translanguaging dimension allows for metacognitive and meta-affective realizations on Mohan’s identities as a multilingual. This is in part due to the open-ended nature of the arts (Nakamura et al., 2024). In creating a poem, for example, the writer has great flexibility in what they say—the ideas and information they choose to include—and

in how they say it. This is also part of why the arts have been found to be so effective in supporting people to explore sensitive and traumatic experiences (Tumanyan & Huuki, 2020), which leads us into our next theme.

Metaphor as a Self-Made Benchmark on the Developmental Journey

Mohan's symbolism around "the mask" and "the sound behind it" along with the metaphor of the flower petals became important touchstones as we met in the following months. Eight months after the initial workshops, I asked Mohan to read his poem over again. He described this reading as revealing:

It was still winter during that time, so almost a year, and during this one year I have realized a lot of things have changed for me personally ... Before, I was accommodating to everyone. If they say, "The sky is green," I'll go and say that it's green. But [now,] if I know it's blue, I'm going to stick to that point: that it is blue. It's up to you if you agree with me or not (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023).

When I asked him if anything had changed to bring about this change, he explained that he had gone through two major life events: the death of a parent and a breakup. He discussed how the loss of his parent had catalyzed a questioning of the norms he had internalized in his formative years in India. With this questioning came a sense of turning away from his Hindi-language identity, for now, and turning towards inhabiting his Japanese self more fully: "In Hindi, I am frustrated with a lot of things about my life, so I pose questions: 'Why are you doing this? Don't do this!' ... That's my actual feelings" (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023). Soon after the passing of his parent, Mohan experienced a breakup with a Japanese person. This he described as a wake-up call, leading him to question his "masked" behaviour and shift his way of interacting in Japanese to one that was more direct and assertive, as the longer quote above indicates.

So that shy Japanese guy became more ... curious ... it's more like, I want to know more, to become confident in the language, and my whole life is more surrounded with [many relationships with Japanese people]. So that's why this shy Japanese guy is not shy anymore. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

Mohan also expresses his interactions in Japanese through the metaphor of a tree and its flower petals in the poem's lines:

Ever seen a flower petal falling on the sea, so gentle, so beautiful...
[I]: I think I am similar to these flower petals
I will become friends without making any noise.]"

At our last meeting, when I asked Mohan how this poem would be different were he to write it today, he said, "I'm not the [flower] petals [being released onto the water] anymore ... Now, I would be the tree, releasing the petals" (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023). He described being the one acting, rather than being acted upon, reflecting a sense of pride in his progress and transformation. Mohan expressed a sense of curiosity and excitement at the growth of his Japanese self, wondering out loud how "this Japanese guy" would develop.

Understanding Proficiency Through the Proportions of the Poem in Each Named Language

Mohan identified another way in which the poem offered a reference point for reflection on his linguistic development by bringing up the idea of proportion. When I asked Mohan

how the poem would be different if he were to write it today, he explained that the proportion of the poem written in each named language would be different. Here, he associated proportion with proficiency rather than with creative or culturally-informed choice.

If I ever write this poem again, or any other poem again, probably there will be more excerpts from Japanese, less from Hindi ... yeah, least from Hindi, and second probably will be English, as always, and posing questions will definitely be there, in English, so yeah, it's different. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

This last statement about posing questions was related to my observation that in the original poem, the questions posed were almost all in Japanese or Hindi. Since working at the center for a longer period, Mohan realized that asking questions was now central to his conversational style in English:

[I] realize that I pose questions because I want answers... See, when I'm talking in English, [because] that's what I speak at [the center, that] has made me more like a person who is pushing other people to speak, and to do that, I have to ask questions. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

He also linked proportions to the idea of a time limit. In discussing his own trajectory as a language learner, Mohan described his current comfort levels with the languages in his repertoire along a continuum. About Hindi, his mother tongue, he explained: "I can talk [to my friends back home] for hours at length without stopping at all" (Mohan, personal communication, June 30, 2023). Mohan is extremely fluent and "totally comfortable" in English, but despite his academic prowess and confident communication style, his limit for conversing in it is two or three hours, and "I'll probably remember everything [I said] in English," which would not be the case for Hindi. He connected this sense of being more self-conscious in English to a kind of distance associated with a sense of control. Mohan initiated the idea of measuring his proficiency through the "time limit" he felt in each language. In his newest language of Japanese, then, his time limit was shorter.

Translanguaging Performance Poetry Supporting Learner Agency: "In small terms, you can define yourself"

Mohan expressed enthusiasm about the genre of performance poetry and expressed that he felt a high degree of agency in his creative choices for his text and performance. He highlighted the way the concision of poetry, as opposed to short fiction, which he had some prior experience in, supported his process:

I like to write stories ... but never tried poems ... it's better than writing a story—in small terms, you can define yourself. (Mohan, personal communication, February 27, 2023)

This concision coupled with the openness of the genre to wordplay and innovation allowed for a sense of freedom in the creative process.

Poetry... is about the expression, so it might not have a typical so-called pattern, but the way you say it is more important... so it's like, when I did it, I had my own way of expressing my feelings. So, there are parts which sound really good in Hindi and that expresses my feelings the best way possible. (Mohan, personal communication, June 30, 2023)

Mohan also appreciated the performance aspect of the process, explaining how it motivated him to innovate:

The performance matters. Like afterwards, if I have a performance [coming up] then maybe when I write, it will be very grand, or like the things [I include] will be very much more, like showmanship, because I like to do that kind of stuff. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

The translanguaging dimension of the approach coupled with the language mapping method could also be understood as fostering greater potential for exploration in multimodal terms. This multimodal awareness is illustrated in his intentional incorporation of additional multimodal elements to his poetry performance. As Mohan uttered the last line, he unzipped his hoodie and took out a yellow sheet of paper hidden there (Figure 1). On it he had drawn, in red, the symbol used in Japan to indicate fragile packages, echoing the last line: 取扱注意, or "Handle with Care."

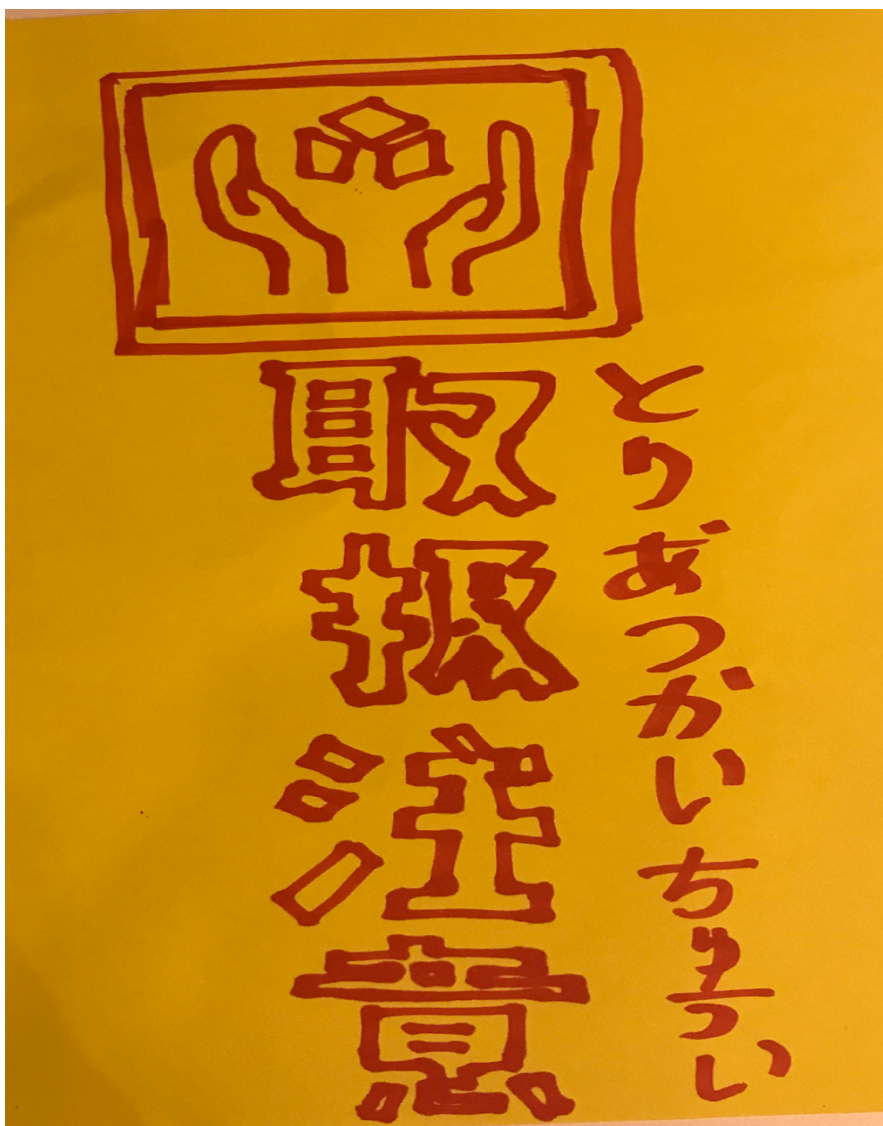


Figure 1. Mohan's hand-drawn "Handle with Care" sign

Mohan also described the impact of the translanguaging approach and the language mapping process as important to his sense of being able to choose the best way to express his multilingual reality through both the map and the poem:

... There was this [Japanese] word which I used during [language] mapping. It's called as "otome" which is like a little girl [YY: Also "maiden."]. So, if I write "little girl" [in English], it ... does not sound that emphatic or something ... I can say it in my own languages, [but] something ... just does not feel right. But when you say [otome], it has a different meaning, because there's a culture behind that language. So ... it's not [just] about the whole general idea that this [named] language is more comfortable for me. I think there are specific [terms] where you feel comfortable when you speak that specific thing in that language. (Mohan, personal communication, June 30, 2023)

The use of translanguaging seemed to have supported his agentic resolve to capture a specific cultural concept or connotation in its language of origin. On a related note, Mohan talked about enjoying exercising even greater agency in selecting the parts that would "sound really good" in Hindi versus English or Japanese. This signals the potential impact of the translanguaging approach in facilitating agency in the learning process.

Discussion

The pedagogic activities that facilitated the creation of Mohan's artworks and the dialogic process that followed hold clear strengths and areas for improvement, and certainly more of the latter than discussed here. But the pedagogical value of translanguaging performance poetry, along with the language mapping process that grounded the creative process in embodied knowledge, lies in their power as a "small" window into their creators' inner worlds. Mohan's artworks captured his perceptions of his languaging (Swain, 2006) practices at a moment in time, signaling to educators which questions to ask, or at least which to start with. Besides being concrete expressions of "mini-mastery experiences" (Vitale, 2012) that arts-based education can offer, his works acted as a touchstone through which to reflect on ongoing linguistic development: deeply personal artifacts crystallizing a moment in time and space. Translanguaging and the arts are a natural fit in working towards such reflection through sensory and "felt knowledge" (Million, 2009) zooming in on the multimodal nature of communication and expression (Hirsu et al., 2021) to facilitate connection and reflection in more holistic terms. As a vehicle through which members of a learning community might exchange and co-create understandings, translanguaging arts-based pedagogy offers kaleidoscopic potential for growth in both individual and relational terms. Taking this a step further, then, if I were to have created a poem in parallel and reflected on it with Mohan alongside our reflections on his development, how could our dialogue have been deepened or extended?

Implications for Practice

Although our lives are multimodal, schooling has privileged text above other semiotic resources (Kalantzis & Cope, 2009). This may be all the more so in language education. As Jones (2020) points out, "it may be the very idea of 'language' itself (or at least 'named languages') that is the single factor working against the flourishing of creativity in language classrooms" (p. 2, emphasis in original). If we are to truly embody this creative spirit, though, it is critical that we engage in the dialogical meaning-making processes that follow artistic creation as non-hierarchically as possible. The more we, as educators, can engage with learners' diverse ways of knowing from a perspective that centers their worldviews, the more effective we will be at engaging in mutual development with our students, as partners in the practice of learning. Creative translanguaging processes can catalyze the building of new paradigms for conveying this development. Because it is not simply that dialoguing

around the poem, or some other artistic creation, will help us become better at teaching or advising the student, although it surely will. It can also expand both teacher and learner understandings of language and contribute to our capacity for empathy and for perceiving each other's strengths along with our growth areas. Of course, it can take time to build trust and develop the common language to express such embodied, often abstracted truths. In the dialogue with Mohan, as trust grew with each meeting, deeper understandings emerged. Focusing the process on trust-building and connection over (a particular vision of) skills development was critical to this result.

Finally, the flexible and condensed nature of translanguaging performance poetry was a key strength of the activities. Future research could explore how authentic, peer-created materials such as translanguaging poems can be instructive and supportive to learners as they develop their identities as emergent bilinguals. More research is certainly needed into the myriad ways that the centering of such creations can build learner autonomy and connectedness in language learning settings in Japan and beyond.

Review Process

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